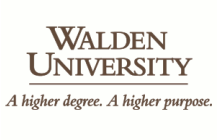

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High Wire, No Net: Emergence from Generational Poverty without Higher Education

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
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2016

ABSTRACT

High Wire, No Net: Emergence from Generational Poverty without Higher Education

by

Corey Alan Caugherty

MA, Duquesne University, 2009

BA, Saint Vincent College, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services, Family Studies and Intervention Strategies

Walden University

May, 2016

Abstract

Existing literature indicates that education is vital to overcoming poverty, yet educational prospects for those in persistent, generational poverty (GP) are often limited. This qualitative phenomenological study centered on the emergence from GP of individuals without formal education beyond 12th grade or a high school equivalency certificate, and explored how those who have done it perceived their experiences. Rutter's resilience theory was the conceptual framework for examining this phenomenon and its challenges and processes. A sample of five adult participants from the United States were recruited using a snowball method, completed a screening survey, and then participated in in-depth interviews. The multiple case study structure provided biographical narratives for each participant that thoroughly described the phenomenon. Analysis was done via interpretive phenomenological analysis which relied on careful scrutiny of the data and a full grasp of how the phenomenon was understood and experienced by participants in their unique contexts. Results indicated many parallels among the narratives. All participants reported GP-related anxiety during childhood and/or adolescence; each recalled the positive presence of at least one influential non-family member as critical to personal growth; and all reported positivity, work ethic, and personal agency as keys to emergence from GP. This conclusion of this study indicated the need for a model for the emergence from GP of individuals without formal secondary education. The social change implications are the potential development of mentoring programs based on the participants' perceived replicability of their accomplishments and their willingness to share their experiences in order to foster self-agency and self-advocacy among children and adolescents in GP.

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Dedication

This is dedicated to my wife, Jennifer. She has been my inspiration, motivator, sounding board, editor, most ardent supporter, and toughest critic. You are an exceptional wife, mother, and best friend. Thank you for everything that is good in my life.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the devoted efforts of my chair, Dr. Mary Bold, and my committee member, Dr. Lillian Chenoweth. Dr. Bold has been a supportive mentor and has worked tirelessly to uphold the integrity of Walden University and this program. Her insights and professionalism have been invaluable. Dr. Chenoweth has joined me in-progress and has been a true asset to this process. Her attention to detail and willingness to help has been wonderful. Additionally, I feel I need to thank the department head, Dr. William Barkley, for his help in overcoming obstacles during this long and sometimes arduous journey. Finally, I must emphatically thank Dr. Munira Merchant, who was my first Walden University mentor and helped guide me since my enrollment. Since the first days Dr. Merchant has provided honest direction and support. I am very indebted to these fine educators.

I would also like to acknowledge all of my family and friends who have supported me in this lengthy and sometimes trying endeavor. Thank you for your inexhaustible patience and belief.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the phenomenon of individuals emerging from generational poverty (GP) without formal education beyond high school or obtaining a high-school equivalency certificate. I examined the articulated essences of meaning in participants' lived experiences, and queried what each individual was feeling, sensing, thinking, experiencing before, during, and as a result of the phenomenon. I conducted formal interviews with participants to focus on and fully reconstruct the context of GP for each individual as well as the circumstances and context surrounding his or her emergence from it. This research may be used by policy-makers and those working in social services to better understand perceptions held by the generationally poor.

Numerous factors require examination in order to understand the phenomenon fully: the nature of GP, education as it relates to the generationally poor, emergence from GP, and resilience. Edin and Kissane (2010) reviewed a decade of poverty research in order to measure the impact of poverty on women, children, couples, and families. They delivered a framework for understanding modern-day poverty in the United States by providing geographic, educational, and demographic analyses, as well as an examination of families in the context of welfare reform. Edin and Kissane also incorporated policy perspectives to reflect the impact of recent and 1990s legislation aimed at the impoverished, particularly Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and welfare to work programs. Their conclusions indicated a need for more research into behaviors of

those in poverty rather than traditional measures of poverty or anti-poverty policy analysis.

One such behaviorally-oriented study was Blanden and Gibbons' (2006) landmark research. They used cohort data from two British groups of youth, one from the 1970s and one from the 1980s, to examine, over time, the presence of poverty through a generational lens. Data from this research indicated a noteworthy persistence of poverty from teenage years into mid-adulthood (early thirties). Members of the 1970's cohort who, at age 16, had poor parents were four times more likely to be out of poverty in their early thirties, while those with non-poor parents were nine times more likely to be non-poor as adults (Blanden & Gibbons, 2006). Their 1980's cohort data indicated a downward trend: While teenagers growing up poor in the 1970's group had double the chance of being poor as adults as their peers who were not poor as teenagers, the 1980's group of poor teenagers were four times more likely to be impoverished in adulthood (Blanden & Gibbons, 2006).

Broader in scope, Wagmiller and Adelman's (2009) research examined the odds of individuals from all income strata becoming impoverished adults. Information for their study came from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), which collects information on the social and economic status of PSID families and their offspring every year in the United States. Wagmiller and Adelman (2009) identified key characteristics of poverty in the United States: 35% of children born between 1970 and 1990 experienced poverty before turning 16; individuals who were poor as children had a greater likelihood of experiencing poverty as adults; African American individuals who experience

childhood poverty have significantly more difficulty escaping poverty than white individuals. Wight, Chau, and Aratani (2011) built on this research to help illustrate who America's poor children are based on geography, ethnicity, and family composition and found that poor children are more likely to be African-American, Hispanic, or Native American. Furthermore, having immigrant parents is a risk factor, and official poverty rates are highest for children aged six or younger.

Identifying who the generationally poor are leads to consideration of the transferability of GP. Rodgers (1995) employed a 20-year sample size of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics and provided a large-scale view of GP within the United States. She determined that the children of poor parents had a significant risk, 16 to 28 percent, of passing on their poverty to their children. Rodgers empirical research illustrated the transferability of poverty from one generation to the next. She analyzed several characteristics of the generationally poor including gender, ethnic background, and geographical location. Rodgers' (1995) research provided a base of information regarding who the generationally impoverished in the United States are including their different identities, mores, and norms. Building on this type of research, Lee, Hill, and Hawkins (2012) discussed the role of educational aspirations among those in GP and their relationship with formal education. They found that high educational aspirations and expectations were commensurate with higher average household income by age 30. Furthermore, their findings suggest that high and escalating educational expectations by parents and/or caregivers throughout high school might, over time, alleviate the transferability of poverty.

Tomlinson and Walker (2010) concluded that persistent poverty is a multi-faceted problem that goes beyond merely a scarcity of resources/income. This research reinforced earlier work (Harper, Marcus, & Moore, 2003) which indicated that the risk of GP transmission requires addressing on multiple fronts. Their research also contributed to the knowledge of the manner and nature of GP transmission.

Legislation aimed at mitigating hardships associated with poverty have been copious (Bird & Higgins, 2010) and have attempted to address poverty on numerous fronts: immigration issues (Borjas, 2011); employment-focused programs and legislation (Boushey & Tilly, 2009); healthcare benefits and governmental services (Canvin, et al., 2007; Hansen, Bourgois, & Drucker, 2013); crime (Gustafson, 2009; Kohler-Hausmann, 2015); ethnicity (Johnson, 2010; Lamont & Small, 2010); children and families (Shanks & Danziger, 2010); government housing and subsidies (Shin, 2014); tax laws and their relationship to poverty (Tahk, 2014); and geographical vagaries of concentrated poverty rates (Wilson, 2010). Even wide-ranging efforts over recent decades aimed at changing the ethos of the poor by legislative promotion of religion/morality, marriage, and work have been attempted by lawmakers (Randles, 2013; Roberts & Martin, 2010). Although both means-tested and social insurance government programs have positively impacted certain groups such as the disabled and elderly, other groups are underserved by legislative remedies (Ben-Shalom, Moffitt, & Scholz, 2011). Emergence from GP for those not best served by government programs, the non-disabled and non-elderly, is more likely to occur as a result of something other than public assistance.

Families and children in GP endure hardships and scarcities that are outside of the purview of average Americans (Tomlinson & Walker, 2010). Holmes and Kiernan (2013) examined GP and its social, educational, and physical impact upon children. Their research indicated that children in GP have significant cognitive and behavioral deficits compared to both those episodically impoverished and those whose families are in higher income strata. Rutter, Champion, Quinton, Maughan, and Pickles' (1995) found a correlation between individuals' behavior and circumstances during childhood and adolescence, and psychosocial factors in adulthood that posed risk for psychiatric disorders later in life. This study indicated an opportunity to curtail such tendencies with interventions carried out at crucial times, a practice which aligns with Rutter's concept of breaking negative chain reactions.

Children in poverty, however, have been shown to have a far more difficult path to educational achievement than their more affluent peers (Blanden & Gibbons, 2006; Blanden & Gregg, 2004; Ladd, 2012; Noguera, 2011; Wrigley, 2012). Blanden and Gregg (2004) conducted research to explore the link between educational attainment and family income, using United States data to guide research in the United Kingdom. Their study centered on discovering some of the reasons for the disparity between educational attainments for poor families as compared to more economically advantaged families. They examined educational disparity not only through a scarcity of resources lens, but also more in depth by considering parenting skills, environment, and other factors related to being raised in poverty.

Mullin and Arce (2008) used qualitative data from social workers to ascertain the resilience of families in poverty. They sought to determine which characteristics, traits, and practices permit these families to overcome obstacles in their day-to-day lives. Mullin and Arce's (2008) research shares similarities with my research project as it centers on families in poverty and resilience characteristics.

Rutter's (2006) synthesis of resilience concepts for scientific understanding offers a distillation of the concept of the "steeling" effect. This concept, which states that stress or adversity exposure can inure one to future stress or adversity, is a significant feature of Rutter's resilience theory. Wadsworth and Santiago (2008) conducted research intended to evaluate the effects of coping with poverty-related stress and the risk and resiliency mechanisms of families in poverty in the United States. By evaluating levels of poverty-related stress, the researchers determined that living in poverty creates its own set of risks factors not experienced by the more affluent. Also, risks common to most of society are sometimes magnified by impoverished conditions. Finally, their work showed that the protective and risk factors of families in poverty differ greatly from families in more affluent conditions. This research is significant in helping to identify specific negative chain reactions among the generationally poor.

In summary, my research project offers a broad-perspective examination of the phenomenon of an individual escaping GP without the benefit of formal education beyond high school or a high school equivalency certificate. Investigating the nature of GP and emergence from poverty from the point of view of participants offers a more complete understanding of the extensive process, including its innumerable difficulties.

By considering this phenomenon through the lens of formal education beyond high school as well as Rutter's resilience theory, I sought to offer a holistic yet deeply personal study of the phenomenon.

Statement of the Problem

Children represent 19.9% of all those in poverty in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). As existing literature shows and popular sentiment reflects, education beyond high school is regarded as a critical component of an individual's emergence from poverty (Attree, 2006; Holmes & Kiernan, 2013; Morgan, 2012, Mortensen, 1993; Rodgers, 1995). However, opportunities for individuals mired in GP are often extremely limited due to expense, social pressures, or other limitation to access (Canvin, Jones, Martila, Burstrom, & Whitehead, 2007; Awan, Malik, Sarwar, & Waqas, 2011; Urhan et al, 2012). One issue is the paucity of research that focuses on individuals who have emerged from GP without the benefit of higher education. Researching their experiences may serve to address an issue underserved by the literature: How are individuals able to emerge from GP without formal education beyond high school or a high school equivalency certificate?

Nature of the Study

Using a qualitative phenomenological research design, I focused on describing the experiences of participants (Moustakas, 1994) and providing interpretations (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). I kept written journals of my observations, thought processes, and behaviors during data collection, and have incorporated them into a methods discussion below (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011; Smith, Flowers, &

Larkin, 2009). Data analysis was an iterative process. Following transcription, I classified and sorted the data since a vast amount of notes and transcripts resulted from the interviews. I coded for themes according to behaviors, emotions, thought processes, and other revelatory information that I identified. I used interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), "a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, pg.1), as a logical and effective approach for data analysis. One of the criteria that I established for participation was that an individual had to have maintained an income above the federal poverty limit for at least five consecutive years at the time of the interview(s) to be considered "fully emerged" from GP. I considered as eligible for participation any individual who had continued educational pursuits beyond the five-year, fully-emerged time specification.

Research Question

My primary, qualitative research question was: How do individuals born into GP that earn only a high school diploma or high school equivalency certificate perceive their emergence from generational poverty?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the phenomenon of escaping GP by participants without education beyond 12th grade. The research examined the articulated essences of meaning in participants' lived experiences (Husserl, 1970; Moustakas, 1994) including what each individual was feeling, sensing, thinking, and experiencing before, during, and as a result of the phenomenon. I conducted

extensive interviews in an attempt to reconstruct the context of GP for each individual, and to understand the circumstances and environment surrounding his or her emergence process.

Conceptual Framework

I used Rutter's theory of resilience (2006) as the theoretical framework for this study. Rutter's research on resilience has shown that processes rather than single specific traits help individuals overcome the potentially devastating effects of stress. At the 2010 conference of the American Psychological Association, Rutter offered his definition of the concept, claiming "resilience is the relative resistance to environmental risk experiences, or the overcoming of stress or adversity, or a relatively good outcome despite risk experiences" (Rutter, quoted in Fenichel, 2010). The overarching concept of resilience can be simply stated as successful functioning despite the presence of high risk (Fraser, Richman, & Galinsky, 1999). Resilience, then, is defined contextually (biological, environmental, emotional) and has positive outcomes that are also dependent on the context. In my study, resilience refers to an individual's ability to emerge from GP despite the pressures and hazards associated with growing up impoverished. Rather than viewing resilience as a different way of looking at risk and protection, focusing on the variables, and then moving towards results, resilience theory begins with an acknowledgement of broad variables in people's responses to similar events and then considers outcomes (Rutter, 2006, 2012). Rutter relates resilience to specific mechanisms such as the steeling effect, which refers to an individual's use of previous stress and stressful events in his or her experience or to protect oneself from future events of stress.

Another resilience concept developed by Rutter is the breaking of negative chain reactions and the establishments of positive ones at the individual level. Coping effectively with adversity is pivotal to breaking negative chain reactions of behavior. Individuals able to break negative chain reactions are usually able to develop numerous ways of overcoming environmental and personal challenges which leads to establishing positive chain reactions (Rutter, 2006). I will expound on these key elements of Rutter's theory in the next chapter.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were operationally defined:

Bracketing: The deliberate setting aside of any preconceived ideas, notions, judgments, or bias in regard to subject matter, participants, setting, or any other aspect of the research being conducted. The investigation of participants' personal experiences in conjunction with the phenomenon being studied enabled the researcher to avoid bias and prejudice (Moustakas, 1994).

Epoché: The detached philosophical stance achieved through bracketing that permits researchers to accurately develop a picture of the participants' lived experiences with the phenomenon being studied in the participants' own voice that is not influenced, filtered, or clouded by the researcher's personal experience. Nothing is assumed and the researcher should describe what he or she witnesses in detail and in this fashion witness the appearance of the world (Bergoffen, 2012; Husserl, 1962).

Federal poverty line: The poverty guidelines updated regularly in the *Federal Register* by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services under the authority of 42 U.S.C. 9902(2) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015).

Generational poverty (GP): The transmission of poverty from older members of a family to younger members, primarily from adults to their children (Harper, Marcus, & Moore, 2003). Generational poverty is when an impoverished child grows up to be an impoverished adult. (Attree, 2006; Beegle, 2003; Harper, Marcus, & Moore, 2003).

Heuristic research: Research that investigates the lived experiences of individuals via a systematic methodology (Moustakas, 1994). Heuristic research is scientific inquiry, which results in the discovery of human experiences and their meanings.

Lived experience: The knowledge and skills acquired over time that human beings consider meaningful to them (Polkinghorne, 1988). This term is commonly used in phenomenology, a research method that seeks to describe the experiences lived through by the study's participants.

Phenomenology: A method of qualitative research that focuses on the lived experiences of the participants (Hatch, 2002; Husserl, 1962; Merriam, 2002; Moustakas, 1994). Research can focus on questions that are used to distill the essence of human experiences (Hatch, 2002); consequently, interviews are a primary data collection tool employed in phenomenology (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2002; Moustakas, 1994).

Post-secondary education: A term for any formal education beyond high school or high school equivalency.

Poverty/in poverty: These terms refer to individuals who live on low or very low amounts of income, means, goods, or support. People in poverty are designated as such by guidelines used to determine financial eligibility for any/all of the following governmental assistance programs: food stamps, free or reduced price school lunch, free school breakfast, or free school milk, TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), AFDC (Aid for Families with Dependent Children), General Assistance, SSI (Supplementary Social Security Income), Medicaid, childhood coverage under government-supplied medical insurance such as CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program), housing assistance, and energy assistance. The guidelines are available at https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines.

Emergence from poverty: For the purposes of this research study, this term refers to a time period of at least five consecutive years when a participant's annual income totaled at least 200% of the federal poverty line for the years in question. Figures were taken from the US Department of Health and Human Services guidelines for specific years. Information was retrieved from: http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/index.cfm.

Situational poverty: A period of being poor caused by situational factors, in contrast with generational poverty, which is a form of entrenched poverty that can encompass multiple generations of a family (Mullen & Kealy, 2013).

Superordinate themes: A collection of themes with notable patterns in participants' embodied, emotional, and intellectual experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Theme: A unit of meaning in a participant's lived experience that produces a description of the fundamental nature of the phenomenon being studied (Boyatzis, 1998).

Assumptions of the Study

In this confidential study, I assumed that participants specifically, honestly, and exactly communicated their personal experiences about growing up in GP and their emergence from poverty when I interviewed them. The participants told their stories from their own worldview and did so willingly and without coercion. I further assumed that participants could correctly evaluate their childhood socio-economic status in spite of being potentially unaware of the economic specifics of their individual households. The individuals who emerged from generational poverty without the benefit of education beyond K-12 or a high school equivalency certificate may have had experiences that were similar to others in similar contexts. There are likely to be characteristics that the studied group shares with other individuals who have emerged from different circumstances, for example those in situational poverty or absolute poverty. In addition, I diligently bracketed my personal experience with growing up in poverty and the subsequent influence of higher education in my life.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study involved five individuals, one woman and four men, with an age range of 43-70. For this research, I have defined the phenomenon of escaping GP without post-secondary education as having been in poverty (below the federal poverty line) all throughout childhood and remaining in poverty until emerging from poverty during young adulthood or adulthood (generally at or over 18 years of age). Individuals

were raised by a parent, parents, or guardian(s) who were also in poverty throughout their lives. I ascertained this via self-reporting of participants and was thus dependent upon their perceptions.

Phenomenological research employs practices designed to ensure the validity of findings (Grigori, 2011; Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), several of which I employ. I used rich, thick description to make certain that an ample level of detail about the phenomenon studied was incorporated so that others might form similar conclusions. I also used member checking, which involves presenting the study's conclusions to original participants so they can comment in regard to accuracy, to strengthen validity. An external audit, which involved the reading of the research by a third party in order to ensure logic and coherence, was a final step in ensuring the credibility of this research. While other individuals may have had similar experiences in different states and regions, this study was not intended to provide generalized data applicable to others who have experienced or are experiencing GP, or the emergence from GP.

Limitations

One weakness of the phenomenological approach in the study of emerging from GP is the fact that, in some instances, emergence is a lifelong process that indelibly alters the person experiencing it. Such complexity may make it less amenable to a phenomenological analysis. Also, the reliability of accounts recorded during interviews may be circumspect since, when interpreting their own past actions, people may not accurately describe their own actions and their initial intentions. This does not mean that

descriptions of the *experiences* were made untrustworthy by observational and interview data, but rather that findings were difficult to accurately interpret. In qualitative research, validity is not the reproducibility of results (as in an experimental design), or the generalizability of findings (as it is in quantitative research), but rather the degree to which the data and the interpretation of the data are credible.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the research is that it may fill an existing gap in the body of available research regarding those in GP. In addition, this research may also offer insight to those employed in social services as well as social services policy-makers by illuminating perceptions held by the generationally poor in regard to their lived experiences. Research centered on the lived experiences of individuals capable of overcoming such long odds may offer tremendous practical value by answering the question, "Without formal education beyond high school or a high school equivalency certificate, how are individuals able to emerge from GP?"

Summary

Children represent more than a third of all United States individuals in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012; Wight, 2011). Existing literature indicates that an integral component of overcoming poverty is acquiring education beyond high school. In fact, education is often viewed as the chief vehicle out of impoverishment (Bengali & Daly, 2013; Chaudhry, Malik, Hassan, & Faridi, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2010, Gofen, 2009; Holmes & Kiernan, 2013; Morgan, 2012), yet prospects for individuals entrenched in persistent, GP are often extremely limited due to expense, social pressures, geographical

considerations, or other limitations to access (Awan, Malik, Sarwar, & Waqas, 2011; Canvin, Jones, Martila, Burstrom, & Whitehead, 2007; Urhan, Currier, Elliott, Wechsler, Wilson, & Colbert, 2012). The scarcity of research focused on individuals' emergence from poverty without higher education provides few research-based answers for those trapped in GP with few options.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview of the Chapter

Those individuals who have emerged from generational poverty (GP) without education beyond high school or a high school equivalency certificate have experiences that are worthy of study. What about the essence of their experiences can provide greater understanding about poverty? In this literature review I offer an overview with a specific description of search strategies I used to gather peer-reviewed articles and supplementary scholarly materials.

The review is then organized in sections of related topics and sub-topics including: a definition of the most common types of economic poverty in the United States with a comparison of situational poverty and GP, the two most prominent forms of poverty in the American consciousness; large-scale factors that influence GP; overarching factors that contribute to the persistence of poverty across broad sections of society; influences that impact specific populations in regard to race, gender, and geographical information are outlined. The theoretical framework of understanding GP and the many root circumstances which cause it to emerge and persist among populations in the United States; governmental and social responses to poverty, including an overview of the success rate of various government programs aimed at poverty emergence; and an examination of the perception that educational opportunity is a panacea for poverty. In addition, I discuss the major challenges to becoming educated while in GP and explore the influence of resilience and its significance to emergence from GP, especially in individuals who lack formal education beyond high school or a

high school equivalency certificate. Next, I reflect on GP as a lived experience, and detail the day-to-day life of an individual mired in GP. Exploring the micro-level lived experience within the larger context of society was essential to understanding GP as a life experience. This chapter concludes with a summary that offers a précis of results I culled from the review of the literature.

Search Strategy

Searching for scholarly literature involved use of many different academic search engines. I began with broad-scope searches to define and explore GP and emergence from poverty in general, and then explored the specific relationship between higher education and emergence from poverty. I consulted multiple databases, including but not limited to: Education Source, Academic Search Complete, EBSCO Host, Business Source Complete, SOCIndex with Full Text, CINAHLPlus with Full Text, Education Research Complete, PsycARTICLES, ScienceDirect, and Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC). In addition, I sought information from anti-poverty organizations such as povertybridge.org, the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (UK), the National Poverty Center at the University of Michigan, and the National Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health (New York). I retrieved and verified statistical information from the databases and statistics available at the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. I also read and referred to several volumes on phenomenological research, poverty, resilience, and social sciences.

In my database searches of scholarly journals, search terms included but were not limited to: *poverty, cyclical poverty, intergenerational poverty, generational poverty, chronic poverty, recurrent poverty, situational poverty, welfare, education, education and the poor, resilience, resiliency, resilience and poverty, poverty emergence,* and *United States poverty and education*. These terms, alone and in combination, yielded copious amounts of information. I limited searches to scholarly books and full-text, peer-reviewed articles (unabridged) in academic publications. I considered resources outside of peer-reviewed journals carefully before including such material in this project. The criteria for inclusion were that the information was (a) from peer-reviewed sources, and (b) limited for use as supporting documentation only.

I used other terminology in searches I conducted to establish the need for research exploring the link between overcoming GP and resilience theory. Search terms for both qualitative analysis methodology and for phenomenological research articles centered on those in poverty and included many of the aforementioned terms plus: *phenomenology, narrative, phenomenological psychology, phenomenological analysis, phenomenological inquiry, qualitative analysis and phenomenology, interpretative phenomenological analysis, social inquiry,* and *action research.* Using resilience theory as a theoretical framework necessitated searching peer-reviewed articles across all of the already-mentioned databases. *Resilience theory, poverty resilience, resilience and poverty* were key terms and combinations in searches of the literature. After initial searches and subsequent follow-ups, I concluded that the research questions were best answered using the theoretical framework of Rutter in the field of resilience theory. I thus limited my

inquiry to three specific concepts: the steeling effect (Rutter 1999, 2006, 2011, 2012); turning point experiences (Rutter, 2013, 2015) and the reduction of negative chain reactions within specific populations (Rutter, 2006). This specific search generated useful peer-reviewed articles and helped tighten the focus of this research project.

Types of Poverty

The U.S. Census Bureau (2012) indicated that, as of 2013, 46.5 million Americans were living below the poverty line. The poverty rate for all children under age 18 is 21%; however, for those living with an unwed mother, the figure rises to 44% (Ross, et al., 2012). Poverty can take different forms and different types of it can share or lack certain characteristics. For example, absolute poverty refers to the condition in which individuals lack basic necessities such as shelter, food, and water, and is a type of impoverishment that is relatively rare in the United States (Jensen, 2009). Situational poverty is a condition usually brought about by a specific life change or event such as a death, illness, or loss of employment (Edin & Kissane, 2010; National Poverty Center, 2010). The transmission of poverty from one generation to the next, referred to as generational poverty (GP), describes the spread of poverty from older family members to younger family members, chiefly from parents to children (Aber, Morris, Raver, & Society for Research in Child Development, 2012; Harper, Marcus, & Moore, 2003; Jensen, 2009). GP occurs when an impoverished child grows up to be an impoverished adult, and is characterized by poverty for multiple (at least two consecutive) generations. It occurs in both urban and rural settings, has a social structure and culture of its own that includes concealed rules and belief systems, and is comprised of individuals who believe

that society owes them a living and who have limited social networks consisting mainly of poor persons within the home community (Attree, 2006; Beegle, 2003; Chronic Poverty Research Centre [CPRC], 2014; Harper, Marcus, & Moore, 2003; Jensen, 2009).

The social structures of those in GP versus those situationally impoverished highlights the differences in social and familial resources between the two groups. Situationally impoverished persons generally have greater resources from which to draw in order to advance their circumstances (Ludwig & Mayer, 2006; Seccombe, 2011). Resources for the situationally impoverished may include a family or social network from their middle class upbringing, for example, which aids individuals in their emergence from their situation. These individuals are less susceptible to a long-term extension of impoverished conditions compared to those in GP (Ludwig & Mayer, 2006; Seccombe, 2011). The basic way of life of the two impoverished groups are divergent. An individual in GP who lacks education and whose social system is made up almost entirely of others in GP will face very different obstacles from an individual experiencing situational poverty (Beegle, 2003; Lamont & Small, 2010; Moskowitz, Vittinghoff, & Schmidt, 2013).

The constructs of GP are more than circumstances born from the economic deprivation of situational poverty. Rather than aspire to educational or vocational goals, people mired in GP tend to focus more on survival. Because of the ever-present reality of economic and material shortfalls, many may consider personal, educational, vocational, and social goals out of reach (Beegle, 2003; Engle & Black, 2008; Stoddard, Henly, Sieving, & Bolland, 2011).

The process of emerging from poverty can vary greatly based upon which type of poverty one is subjected to: those living through situational poverty may have drastically different experiences than those in GP. Individuals and families that experience situational poverty retain familiar social structures since their contexts, at least for a limited time, do not typically change. The associated set of physical items and processes associated with poverty transmission include, but are not limited to, material or financial resources (such as land, material goods, money, or debt) and human assets (such as hereditary conditions and ideas about health and physical well-being, education, coping skills, values, prejudices, attitudes, and skills necessary for survival). Human assets can be both negative (prejudiced attitudes, poor health habits) and positive (hopefulness, cash, or other assets; Anand & Lee, 2011; Harper, Marcus, & Moore, 2003). GP research strongly links education to emergence from poverty (Cremin & Nakabugo, 2012; Engle & Black, 2008; Rodgers, 1995; Tarabini & Jacovkis, 2012), yet educational opportunities beyond compulsory public schooling for individuals in GP are often out of reach due to expense, distance, or other lack of access (Awan, Malik, Sarwar, & Waqas, 2011; Canvin, Jones, Marttila, Burstrom, & Whitehead, 2007; Elliot, 2013; Rodgers, 1995). The influence of relationships to family members and the social structures of the home and surrounding environments can discourage individuals from seeking educational opportunities (Hastings, Taylor, & Austin, 2005; Vaisey, 2010).

Large-Scale Factors Influencing GP

GP and its transmission are affected by societal factors, chief among them are economics and ethnicity. Scholarly examinations of the impact of economic growth on

specific sectors of the impoverished have indicated that all types of poverty have a geographic element as well as a demographic component (Bird & Higgins, 2011; Hoover, Enders, & Freeman, 2008; Montcrieffe, 2009). Hoover, Enders, and Freeman's (2008) landmark examination of economic progress and poverty across United States African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian populations measured over 35 years by census region demonstrated how diverse factors impacted different racial groups regionally in varying ways. African American poverty was shown to be two and a half times more responsive to GDP growth than Hispanic or White poverty, while White poverty responded more significantly to changes in the rate of unemployment than either Hispanic or African American poverty (Hoover, Enders, & Freeman, 2008). However, relationships emerged between the three sectors, when the researchers examined across regions and groups. For example, African American poverty in the Northeast and Hispanic poverty in the South and Midwest rise relative to White poverty (Hoover, Enders, & Freeman, 2008). This research clarified some of the differing pressures and realities of individuals in GP based not only upon race or ethnicity, but also on their geographical location (Hauser, 2010; Mattingly & Bean, 2010). What one impoverished individual may find beneficial could impact another negatively, depending on various factors. In recent decades, for example, women have joined the workforce in great numbers, which should have served to reduce overall poverty since the earnings of that section of the population increased dramatically. However, the poverty rate actually increased because so many more single women were fulfilling the role of heads of households (Hoynes, Page, & Stevens, 2006; Mattingly & Bean, 2010). This means, in regard to GP, that despite efforts to acquire

more material income, other factors have impeded individuals' efforts to emerge from poverty.

Beyond a limited set of economic, racial, and geographic indicators, fully understanding GP requires consideration at a holistic societal level where the interconnection of social structure, social acts, and social policies and their overarching impact on different segments of the American populace can be evaluated (Wilson, 2010; Jennings, 2011). Urban poverty research is framed by racial inequality, specifically in the African American and Hispanic communities, and centers on the lasting impact of outdated cultural frames and traits. Interventions such as the experimental Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) and Boston's Empowerment Zone (EZ) are examples of reforms aimed at addressing the needs of the cyclically impoverished in urban settings, including educational, commercial, safety, and social needs. Though both the HCZs and EZs results are ongoing, they indicate a need for systemic and widespread proactive changes instead of symptomatic recourse (Wilson, 2010; Jennings, 2011). These types of programs, while far from being all-encompassing solutions for urban GP, provide viable courses of action for addressing GP within racially diverse communities on a limited geographical basis. Rural GP presents more of a challenge, considering that the population concentration of particular regions is far more diffuse. Access to programs that encourage emergence from poverty emergence such as Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) or early education such as Head Start can be more difficult to administer in remote rural areas (Lichter & Cimbaluk, 2009; Mattingly & Bean, 2010). Research findings that emphasize locations over individuals or populations reveal that poverty differs over physical locations, and

that poverty is frequently more prevalent in both inner-cities and less accessible rural areas (Lichter & Cimbaluk, 2009; Mattingly & Bean, 2010).

Theoretical framework of GP

There is not any single large-scale theoretical framework that can fully explain the persistence of poverty from a conceptual standpoint or the chronic nature of poverty within specific nations, regions, or social groups. The nature of GP and the various causes of it differ according to specific context; therefore, descriptions of it necessarily vary (Bird & Higgins, 2010; Fass, Dinen, & Aritani, 2009; Hulume, 2003). Ongoing research into GP and its various structures and components, particularly those of interest to social scientists, remain influenced somewhat by culture of poverty theory (Lewis, 1969). Culture of poverty theory suggests that GP is created by the inheritance, over multiple generations, of beliefs, value systems, skills, and abilities that are created, reinforced, and perpetuated by the society in which individuals live, but are held by individuals themselves (Bradshaw, 2006; Lewis, 1969; McLanahan, 2009). These beliefs are inculcated in successive generations and greatly impact the worldview and character of the children reared in GP (Beegle, 2003; Bird & Higgins, 2010; Lewis, 1969; Seccombe, 2011). Although popularly heralded at the time of its inception, sociologists widely debunked Lewis' theory due to perceived class implications and assignment of personal accountability to individuals, i.e. blaming the victims. Since then, however, sociologists have acknowledged that culture and persistent poverty are intertwined (Massey, 2013).

Sociologists dedicated to the study of poverty use frame analysis (Young, 2010) to examine particular features of culture associated with the broader topic of poverty. Rather than focusing on wholesale definitions of a population that is so diverse, elements of a particular culture are considered in terms of context and the norms, values, meanings, and environments of individuals. Frame analysis provides a construct in which the collected accounts of those in poverty reveals how the poor view themselves and the world around them (Lamont & Small, 2008; Young, 2010). Instead of trying to develop a large-scale definition for an endlessly varied set of individuals and circumstances, the framing approach realistically identifies issues and individuals in a more native context and offers the potential for effective poverty solutions (Young, 2010). By applying this analysis to a limited set of individuals in GP and their particular stories, I was able to undertake a careful examination of the features associated with their specific cultures. In addition, the tendency to generalize about individuals in poverty was greatly reduced.

In this research, participants were neutrally observed and data recorded in the spirit and framework of current research which rejects racist generalizations and attitudes towards those in poverty but recognizes the influence of structures and culture on individuals. I did not employ frame analysis per se, but focused on individual narratives and contexts in an effort to gain the most informed perspective possible.

There are multiple theories for poverty analysis and the analysis of poverty dynamics: human capital theory, labor market theory, permanent income and life-cycle hypothesis, structural poverty theories, and cultural poverty theories (Cellini, McKernon, & Ratcliffe, 2008; Goetz, 2014; Moav & Neeman, 2012). One of the questions these

theoretical perspectives are used to evaluate is: What is the likelihood of people entering, emerging from, and re-entering the many different forms of poverty? These theoretical perspectives are used in attempts to analyze the following: What events are associated with entering and exiting poverty? How do poverty dynamics affect different ethnic groups? How have poverty probabilities, durations, and events evolved over time? How does poverty affect genders differently, especially in regard to female-headed households (Cellini, McKernon, & Ratcliffe, 2008; Johnson, 2010; Mattingly & Bean, 2010).

Responses to GP

Predominantly, the formation of government-sponsored social programs in the US designed to combat poverty, aside from providing monetary assistance in some form, have shared the following characteristics:

- Seek to replace the dysfunctional culture with a more functional one. An example would be the relocation of low-income housing into suburban settings.
- Attempt to re-teach youth mired in the opportunistic and non-productive subculture in order to break the cyclical nature of the poverty. An example would be the Head Start program.
- Work within the existing culture to redefine culturally acceptable strategies that improve the group's well-being. One such example would be micro-enterprises that tap into the entrepreneurial skills of society members. (Bradshaw, 2006; Shanks & Danziger, 2010).

To reach the millions affected by GP, a broad set of government-sponsored social safeguards are necessary to address chronic poverty in a multi-level, comprehensive

fashion (Forde, Bell, & Marmot, 2011; Shanks & Danziger, 2010). Yet, large-scale government services designed to help the poor historically have a tendency to entrench negative attitudes of the targeted social group and may lead some impoverished people to not seek available aid due to the attached or perceived social stigma of doing so (Canvin, Jones, Marttila, Burstrom, & Whitehead 2007; Forde, Bell, & Marmot, 2011; Shanks & Danziger, 2010). This makes eliminating poverty on a national scale incredibly challenging.

One of the goals of US policy is the overarching effort to transform the culture of poor parents in an effort to lessen the likelihood of their children growing up poor. Indicators used most often by policymakers-- marital status of parents and employment-- are unreliable indicators of whether a child grows up to be impoverished (Ludwig & Mayer, 2006; Shanks & Danzigner, 2010; Running & Roth, 2013). Marriage, long viewed as a stanchion against poverty, can no longer be viewed in such black and white terms. Over the last four decades, female employment, wage inequality, cohabitation outside of marriage, and the dramatic increase of childbirths to unmarried women have altered the effects of marriage on poverty (Cancian & Reed, 2009; Running & Roth, 2013). Women who delay childbirth until a long-term partner is found usually experience far greater levels of stability in the home (and thus greater opportunity for quality child-rearing practices to develop) than women who do not delay fertility or have multiple childbearing partners (Edin & Kissane, 2010; McLanahan, 2009).

Policymakers' promotion of employment as a safeguard against future poverty for the children of poor parents has had mixed results at best. Effects of the Welfare Reform

Act of 1996, in which working mothers were offered incentives to find employment and increase the number of hours spent working, resulted in unforeseen negative consequences such as the children of these women having more behavioral and academic difficulties than their peers (Choi & Jackson, 2011; Ludwig & Mayer, 2006). Working poor families were found to have the same level of exposure to overcrowded housing, unsafe neighborhoods, and food scarcity as their non-working counterparts receiving welfare benefits (Boushey & Tilly, 2009; Edin & Kissane, 2010). Likewise, research on moving the impoverished from entitlement programs to employment (welfare to work programs) indicates that while those able to maintain year-round full-time employment are somewhat better off (Edin & Kissane, 2010), the distance the majority of these individuals move from poverty is limited at best. Women moving into only part-time employment are often found to worse off as a result due to the instability of the employment and subsequent diminished contributions by other adult members of the household (Running & Roth, 2013). Additionally, there is a cost to both marriage and working that deserves consideration: married women tend to receive less support from other family members and working women have to pay for child care and other work-related costs (Running & Roth, 2013). Traditional programs that seek to manage unemployment and center on free-market solutions have had far less impact than intended in the US as compared to other democratic nations that combine such efforts with increased welfare generosity (Brady, 2009).

Education as a Means of Emergence from GP

Educational Access and Children of GP

Of all persons living in poverty in the US, 36% are children; comparatively, children make up only 25% of the overall population (Wight, Chau, & Aratani, 2011). Overwhelmingly, poverty emergence research indicates formal education of some type being central to individuals' transitioning out of poverty. Children in poverty, however, have been shown to have a far more difficult path to educational achievement than their more affluent peers (Blanden & Gibbons, 2006; Blanden & Gregg, 2004; Ladd, 2012; Noguera, 2011; Wrigley, 2012). Obstacles for children in poverty include physical deficiencies such as limited access to technology and also potential environmental influences that create difficulty for students to continue schooling beyond high school. These environmental influences can range from negative or apathetic attitudes toward higher education to a lack of adequate parental supervision. Parenting struggles among impoverished people can impact the education of impoverished children in numerous ways.

Child rearing practices of parents in poverty indicate reduced or inconsistent levels of responsiveness, caring, and supervision along with a higher likelihood of using harsh punishments (Berlin et al., 2009; Roggman, 2010; Schofield, et al. 2011). Children exposed to extended periods of poverty are at higher risk for teen pregnancy, low educational achievement, delinquency, social and emotional development issues, physical health problems, and being poor in early adulthood (Leventhal, 2011; Wagmiller & Adelman, 2009). Youth in this circumstance are also far more likely to be raised in

single-parent households, whereas youth raised in two-parent households are statistically more likely to have greater economic well-being (Borjas, 2011; Fass, Dinan, & Aritani, 2009; Felner & DeVries, 2013). All of these factors create circumstances where educational achievement may be given a lower priority because it less directly impacts the hierarchy of immediate needs present in day-to-day life. When children are living in a setting where safety and perhaps survival needs take precedence over other activities, the challenge of developing an appreciation for the long-range benefits of higher education can be great. In the literature, emergence from such circumstances, either with higher education or without, is accompanied by characteristics of family resilience (Mullin & Arce, 2009) or characteristics of resilient individuals such as the ability to self-regulate, success in social relationships (Richaud, 2013) or high self-esteem (Donnellan, Conger, McAdams, & Neppl, 2009).

Emergence from GP and Resilience

The term resilience refers to the indication that some people have a comparatively good psychological outcome in spite of being exposed to risk and risk encounters that have the potential to produce significant negative consequences. Resilience is the ability and adaptive means of surmounting anxiety and difficulties while retaining normal psychological and physical function (Russo, Murrough, Han, Charney, & Nestler, 2012; Wu, Feder, Cohen, Kim, Calderon, Charney, & Mathé, 2013). Resilience indicates a level of protection from external conditions or the act of overcoming stress, hardship, or difficulties (Garmezy, 1974; Rutter, 2006; Rutter, 2011, 2012). Using the conceptual framework of resilience theory in relation to those who manage to emerge from GP

without education beyond obtaining a high school education or equivalency certificate can offer valuable insight into the processes and participants. Resilience in this research project is defined contextually (biological, environmental, emotional) and has positive outcomes that are dependent on the context; for this research, resilience referred to an individual's ability to emerge from GP despite the pressures and risks associated with growing up impoverished.

Certainly, there is ample evidence that genetic factors play a role in the resilience of individuals (Russo, Murrough, Han, Charney, & Nestler, 2012; Wu, Feder, Cohen, Kim, Calderon, Charney, & Mathé, 2013). Because this study is a phenomenological one, based on the narratives of individuals' and their unique life stories, aspects of genetics-based research and resilience were not explored. The perspective of this study was rooted in the tradition of the social sciences rather than neuroscience research.

Among the leading researchers in the field of resilience is Sir Michael Rutter. Rutter's research on resilience is an amalgamation of work related to many different components of resilience: Rutter worked as a medical doctor, studied genetic and environmental factors related to psychological well-being (especially in children), and published research on coping mechanisms and protective factors (Rutter, 1999, 2006, 2011, 2012). Rutter's research on resilience stresses processes rather than specific distinct traits that help individuals remain immune from the devastating effects of stress. Rutter (2011, 2012) defined resilience as the relative resistance to environmental risk experiences or the overcoming of stress or adversity, or a relatively good outcome despite risk experiences. The overarching concept of resilience can be simply stated as successful

functioning despite the presence of high risk (Fraser, Richman, & Galinsky, 1999; Garmezy, 1974; Rutter, 2006, 2012; Wu et al., 2013). Resilience can manifest itself as both behaviors and ways of thinking and it can be responsive and/or proactive in nature.

Of the mechanisms used by individuals to demonstrate resilience, the steeling effect is among Rutter's most well-known contributions to the body of research; steeling effect refers to an individual's use of previous stress and stressful events in his or her experience as an insulator from future events of stress (Rutter, 2006, 2012). Rutter (2006, 2011, 2012) likened the effect of repeated parachute jumping on an individual: the acclimation to the psychological stress of the activity, over time, creates a physiological adaptation to the practice. Similarly, Rutter explored the necessity of exposing oneself to bacteria and small amounts of contamination in order to build resistance to more serious infections and diseases; by using a controlled exposure to risk, one is more equipped to handle future stresses. Literature in the field supports the idea that resilience is developed partially because of experiencing adversity, not in spite of it (Walsh, 2006, 2011). The steeling effect as it relates to emergence from GP without higher education may explain how certain individuals could use and learn from their difficult circumstances early in life in order to make choices that provided a way to emerge from poverty later.

A second component of Rutter's resilience theory is the concept of breaking negative chain reactions at the individual level and establishing positive ones (Rutter, 2006, 2012). Rather than viewing the concept of resilience as a broad characteristic held by certain individuals who overcome negative environments, research has indicated that myriad factors, influences, and processes play a part in resilience (Mullin & Arce, 2008;

Rutter, 1993, 2006, 2012; Walsh, 2011; Wu et al., 2013). Additionally, empirical research also indicates that later experiences in life are not unconnected to previous behaviors or choices (Rutter, 1993 Rutter, 2012; Walsh & Santiago, 2008). Negative individual experiences are not randomly allotted throughout society-- the variance between one individual's environmental risk exposure and another's can be substantial based on conditions beyond the individual's control, and on choices and behaviors of the individual (Rutter et al., 1995). Exposure to risk via circumstance or choices can lead to chain reactions that can extend throughout an individual's life cycle. Children raised in arduous environs often suffer devastating specific events. For example, some children experience the death of a parent, divorce, parental desertion, abuse, neglect, or are exposed to stress and disharmony of their home environment leading up to a specific event and in the aftermath of it. Effective coping mechanisms are necessary for devastating life events as well as proximal causes of damaged family processes. For children and adolescents in GP, breaking negative chain reactions is especially difficult since research indicates that chronically poor children have more detrimental developmental contexts than their peers (Holmes & Kiernan, 2013).

Resilience literature indicates that having an inventory of useful ways in which to deal with adversity, rather than any single universal coping mechanism, significantly increases an individual's likelihood of coping with hardship (Riolli & Sevicki, 2011; Rutter, 1981; Rutter, 2012; Wadswoth & Santiago, 2008; Wu et al. 2013). Coping effectively with adversity is pivotal to breaking negative chain reactions of behavior. Individuals able to break negative chain reactions are better equipped to deal with

obstacles and develop their own positive ways of overcoming environmental and personal challenges (Rutter, 2006, 2011, 2012). Resilient adults able to break negative chain reactions in adverse settings reported that they developed assets they may not have otherwise cultivated (Walsh, 2006). They also valued life and believed that they had experienced their lives to a fuller degree than peers who did not contend with hardship (Walsh, 2006). A possible implication of such struggle with GP is that resilience and coping skills can be learned (Masten, 2011; Rutter, 2006, 2011, 2012; Wu et al., 2013) and can be used effectively to assist in poverty emergence. Even when formal education is not attainable, the ability for individuals to deal with and overcome circumstances resulting from GP may prove to be a crucial component of poverty emergence (Masten, 2011; Wu et al. 2013).

Generational Poverty as Lived Experience

The obstacles between impoverished children and post-secondary educational opportunities are often too great to surmount; many circumstances prevent impoverished children from having access to higher education. Yet stories of incredible success after coming from poverty, particularly GP, without the benefit of higher education are celebrated in Western culture: Sir Richard Branson and Oprah Winfrey are but two globally recognizable figures who have accomplished such a feat. In order to more fully understand how financial independence can be the result after being born into GP and having no education beyond high school or a high school equivalency, research into the lived experience of the phenomenon is essential. Outlier examples of ultra-successful individuals aside, a true understanding of the phenomenon requires an appreciation of

both the social environment of GP as well as the experience of living through GP on an individual, or micro, level. As case studies have shown, the experience of poverty and its circumstances is an amalgamation of overarching social structures, sub-cultural constraints, and experiences as well as individual choices (Seccombe, 2011). Examination of the individuals at a micro-level yet within the macro- context of GP was essential to understanding the phenomenon of emerging from GP without the benefit of higher education.

Qualitative Methodology, Phenomenology, and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Social science research, like psychological research, relies heavily on qualitative methodologies to generate knowledge and understanding. Approaching the study of human knowledge and experience from a strictly quantitative point of view, focused on specific measurables and experimentation while eschewing contextual considerations would offer an incomplete understanding. Qualitative research, reliant on thick, descriptive data is produced via methods such as interviews, observations, focus groups, and document analysis rather than statistical or experimental data. Qualitative methods do not result in numerical data but rather textural descriptions, sounds, or images; they are an interpretive, vibrant, and sometimes abstract process (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Defining qualitative research in an outcome-focused way such as this mitigates the propensity to generalize and avoids the unnecessary stance of pitting quantitative methods against qualitative ones. Applied research, rather than basic research, is conducted with the intention of not only better understanding the problem or

phenomenon under study, but with the intention of contributing to the solution of the problem (Alasuutari, Bickman, & Brannen, 2008). Within this context, this research project was an interpretative form of phenomenology rather than a descriptive one.

Edmund Husserl (1962) was a German philosopher who, along with Sartre and Marleau-Ponty, is considered one of the founders of phenomenology. He advocated that experiences should be examined in the way in which they occur. Rather than attempting to compartmentalize experiences into predetermined categories in our minds, phenomenological researchers should consciously try to study each element in its own right and on its own terms—untouched by any meaning or preconceptions that researchers might attach to it. Husserl advised phenomenological researchers to abandon their normal way of perceiving the world around them and develop a phenomenological attitude; that is, a reflexive orientation that centers on the researcher's perception of the world and events, rather than merely the events themselves (Husserl, 1970). Husserlian phenomenological inquiry is centered on what is experienced in the consciousness of the person being studied (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) and requires bracketing, or putting aside, the world as we know it and take it for granted (Giorgi, 2012). By doing so, researchers are more able to experience the world as it was perceived, recalled, valued, and assessed by their participants—a glimpse into the consciousness of the individual free from any bias or prejudice of the researcher. This endeavor to understand others' relationships to the world around them is essentially interpretative and this research project centered on others' efforts to make meanings out of their lived experiences: one of the main pillars of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

Another significant theoretical foundation of IPA is the study of textual interpretation—hermeneutics. Hermeneutics focuses on the function and process of interpretation itself and seeks to reveal, if possible, the objectives and intended meanings of the texts (Schmidt, 2006). Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher offered a more systematic approach to hermeneutics that required the researcher to be deft at understanding the nuance of the authors' language while simultaneously considering carefully the authors' life and way of thinking (Schmidt, 2006). This is not achieved by a prescribed sequence of steps, but rather by an analysis that is meticulous, thorough, and all-encompassing. This concept of a hermeneutic phenomenology through careful examination of the thing itself as it is revealed to the researcher, via a careful interpretation of the text generated or reviewed in the research process is often attributed to Martin Heidegger (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Heidegger, unlike Husserl, believed that completely bracketing one's personal experiences was impossible to fully accomplish, since our very existence in the world creates a series of preconceptions in our consciousness that influences all of our life experiences (Heidegger in Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Heidegger, thus, proposes an interpretative phenomenology as opposed to as a simply descriptive process and advocates that the core of phenomenological inquiry is the examination of the things themselves as well as a constant, recurring process of recognizing and bracketing of one's own knowledge and experience.

The Hermeneutic Circle and Idiography in IPA

The hermeneutic circle is a concept based on how the holistic understanding of the parts of something relates to the understanding of the whole, and vice versa (Packer & Addison, 1989). Using IPA for analysis requires researchers to continually review and repeat examinations of data, sifting through and understanding the text in as many different ways as possible (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This includes the researcher being aware that his or her own access to the essential meaning of the data can and does occur at many different, interrelated stages and that the process is dynamic. Considering the data in the context of the hermeneutic circle, the relationships of all parts of the data to the entirety of the research project was explored in order to understand the phenomenon as fully as possible to reach the essence of the lived experience.

Idiography is the study of the individual case, whereas research oriented to finding more universal, general principles of human behavior is known as nomothetic (Hermans, 1988; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA focuses on the obligation to great detail and depth of analysis. In addition, a responsibility to fully grasp how a specific phenomenon has been understood and experienced from the point of view of individual people in a specific and unique context (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Idiography focuses on the individual case but puts the researcher in a position to consider how he or she might react to the unique situation being studied and brings to light the commonalities shared by researcher and participant. Though generalities are certainly not the focus of idiographic research, IPA contends that a deep, meaningful understanding of

individual cases can and does bring researchers nearer to essential elements of the more universal.

Summary

Poverty emergence in present-day America depends greatly on the type of economic impoverishment one is experiencing. For example, situational poverty, brought about by a specific event such as a death in the family or illness, can sometimes be overcome by a change in employment status or geographical move (Edin & Kissane, 2010). GP, which is the spread of poverty from older generations of families to younger ones, can be more challenging to surmount due to social limitations and a basic lack of hope (Jensen, 2009; Lamont & Small, 2010, Moskowitz, Vittinghoff, & Schmidt, 2013; Secombe, 2011). Research provides evidence that the emergence from GP is linked to education beyond high school (Cremin & Nakabugo, 2012, Engle & Black, 2008) but this correlation ignores those individuals in GP for whom higher education is unattainable for whatever reason.

Governmental responses to poverty chiefly address two issues: unemployment and an attempt to transform the culture of the impoverished. The latter includes a focus on family and a perpetuation of the concept that education is key for future generations (Brady, 2009; Forde, Bell, & Marmot, 2011; Shanks & Danziger, 2010). Parenting tendencies as well as a predominance of single-parent households among the poor can diminish the priority given to formal education (Berlin et al., 2009; Leventhal, 2011; Schofield et al., 2011). Children are encouraged to aspire to educational goals beyond high school but the reality of their lives is more focused on day-to-day survival. This

creates a dilemma for generations growing up in poverty: education is promoted as the ultimate solution but can remain out of reach. Poverty emergence in the absence of formal education beyond high school or obtaining a high school equivalency, then, requires significant resilience.

Resilience refers to the ability to overcome obstacles or quickly and positively respond to setbacks (Garmezy, 1974; Rutter, 2012). Looking at the phenomenon of emerging from poverty with no formal education beyond high school or obtaining a high school equivalency through the lens of resilience theory has the potential to offer insight into both the process of emergence and the individuals themselves. Process focus lends itself to the research of Sir Michael Rutter, whose work on resilience includes processes such as the steeling effect and breaking negative chain reactions. The steeling effect describes how previous stressful events can act as insulators against future stress and breaking negative chain reactions is the ability to overcome environmental and personal challenges in positive and productive ways. The resilience of individuals who can transcend GP in the absence of higher education is a factor that requires examination.

The third chapter of this study, the Methodology section, contains the design of this research project as well as a detailed plan of analysis that was necessary to fully answer the research questions. IPA was used to generate a detailed interpretation of the unique experiences of the individuals.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Overview of the Methodology

In this chapter on methodology, I open with a description of how the qualitative research design originated from the problem, and then provide a thorough overview of the research design including participant selection, sampling strategies, instruments for data collection, procedures for data collection, analysis and interpretation of data, and protection of human subjects. I conclude the chapter with a summary that reviews key points.

Introduction

A phenomenological approach was useful in helping to understand participants' perceptions of their lived experiences of the transition from GP to financial solvency. Phenomenology afforded me a clear understanding of participants' beliefs, social behaviors, senses of self, and values that may have contributed to their resilience and emergence from GP. I used phenomenological reduction, what Giorgi (2011) has described as fundamentally an act of neutral description. That is, phenomenological reduction takes what is given as existing, but reserves any verification that it truly exists as it is appears. Phenomenological reduction was necessary to avoid interpretation during my interviews and observations of participants. Interpretation occurs in the analysis of data collected, not in the act of collection, lest the data be compromised. Next, I captured subjective experiences of the participants via a multiple-case design consisting of single or multiple interviews. I determined the meaning of the participants' responses through analysis prescribed by IPA methods. The steps involved in IPA analysis are: (a) reading

and re-reading data, (b) initial noting, (c) developing emergent themes, (d) searching for connections across emergent themes, (e) moving to the next case, (f) searching for patterns across cases. I describe these steps in more depth later in this chapter.

Guided by the tradition of qualitative research, I strove to have open dialogues with the participants in order to most fully understand their perspectives. A qualitative methodology best suited the phenomenon under examination because qualitative research seeks to investigate the internal experiences of participants including all events and processes involved (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Hulume, 2003). I pursued this study in order to guide future inquiries into the phenomenon and offer rich, contextually intimate accounts of those who have experienced it first-hand. From a research-centered perspective, perhaps this project can serve as a root for future branches of related research projects. Philosophically, phenomenology provides a view into participants' thought processes and actions, including but not limited to their doubts, feelings, insecurities, dreams, and hopes; their past, present, and planned future actions were the focal points of all data collection (Grigori, 2011).

The Research Design

A phenomenological research design explores the significance individuals attribute to an individual human or social problem or issue. According to Bäckström and Sundin (2007), while phenomenology unearths or discovers meanings, hermeneutics provides the interpretation of meanings. Hermeneutic phenomenology thus contains both description and interpretation, allowing researchers to acquire inter-subjective understanding (Schmidt, 2006; Van der Zalm, Bergum, & Van der Zalm, 2000). In

addition, hermeneutics questions the notion that researchers can discover elemental, neutral, unprejudiced, information about objective qualities of human beings (Guignon, 2012). For hermeneutics, the individual is always meaning-laden, defined by the significances that he or she absorbs from his or her socio-historical context (Finlay, 2009).

Pure phenomenological research seeks to describe rather than explain, and to start from a perspective free from any hypotheses or preconceptions (Husserl, 1970). Additionally, phenomenology does not offer a view of the world as detached from human consciousness, but instead acknowledges human cognizance as fundamental since it is how the world is perceived and defined on all levels (Finaly, 2009; Spurling, 2013). Phenomenological methods effectively bring forward the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own unique perspectives, and are effective for challenging assumptions about the world around us. Within the context of phenomenology, I determined that narratology was the most appropriate framework from which to conduct this research. Narratology asks what is revelatory about the story of the individual in the context of the person and the context from which he or she came. That is, it inquires into how the narrative can be understood so that it gives an understanding of the life and circumstances and social structures that created it (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1995). Narratology treats the stories as data that can exist as pure descriptions of experiences (Robert & Shenhav, 2014).

Comparing and contrasting the data I collected from each of the individuals' in-depth biographies in a multiple case study format brought attention to words and phrases

that were consistent across the interviews. Multiple case study construction permitted a thorough understanding of the specific phenomenon of emergence from GP of individuals without of higher education.

Using this phenomenological data collection method a multiple case study approach in order to compare and contrast data sets, I focused on the participants' experiences and different points of view while recognizing patterns and similarities across the narratives. Multiple case study starts with the collection of the cases and what binds them; to understand the phenomenon better, careful study of individual cases was essential, but my goal was a broader understanding of the phenomenon. The chief objective of multiple case study analysis and of IPA is the study of what is different and similar about the cases in order to understand the binding phenomenon as fully as possible (Stake, 2006). IPA stresses both aforementioned elements and seeks understanding not only of what is shared, but also of the deviations that occur (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Participant Selection

The participants were adult individuals who have emerged from GP for at least five consecutive years without the benefit of education beyond high school or high school equivalency. I recruited participants in several ways including word of mouth, social media, and an outside research web community (findparticipants.com).

Sampling Strategy

During the initial phase of sampling, my strategy was to use a snowball method to recruit participants. I used this method to increase the potential participants for the study.

Though a limited number of individuals were needed for the research (the goal initially was four to nine), phenomenological research is dependent on rich data that results from intimate familiarity with and a full understanding of the meaning individuals or groups assign to a social or uniquely human problem (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008; Husserl, 1970). Pure phenomenological research seeks to essentially describe rather than explain, and to start from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconceptions (Husserl 1970). IPA analysis builds upon the Huesserlian foundation by taking the step of interpreting data rather than stopping at descriptive phenomenology (Flowers, Larkin, & Smith, 2009). The criteria I established for participation in this study were that the individual participant was born into poverty and that his or her parents also grew up impoverished. Participants had to have emerged from poverty without formal higher education and remained out of poverty for at least five consecutive years in order to be considered fully emerged from GP for the purposes of this study. In addition, I sought individuals from my home geographical area of origin, Western Pennsylvania, since poverty in much of this region was significant 25 years ago and remains so now. In order to reach out to this population, I used social media (Facebook), personal and professional contacts, and word-of-mouth.

After receiving Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for this research project, I contacted potential participants and determined their qualifications for the study. Specifically, I asked about the economic backgrounds of potential participants and their willingness to participate in the study. Initially, I contacted 15 respondents who responded to my inquiries on social media posts, email contacts, and

findparticipants.com. Following the initial conversations, I invited individuals to complete the initial survey-screening instrument to determine their eligibility for this project. Eight participants met the criteria for the study, but I reduced that number to five following conflicts of availability, a lack of willingness to re-schedule interviews, and a reconsideration of participation based upon the personal nature of the subject matter.

Research Procedures

At the start of each interview, I provided a consent form (Appendix C) which notified each participant that the nature of the deeply personal stories could possibly cause stress during the interview. To establish trust, I ensured that participants fully understood that they had the right to refuse participation and to leave the study at any time, with no negative consequences. I outlined the potential need for professional counseling during or following the interview process and follow-up conversations. If participants had required services for which they did not have access, I provided contact information for local crisis centers and low or no-cost counseling. Additionally, I was fully prepared to contact emergency services should any of the participants feel overwhelmed or incapacitated from recalling difficult or emotional memories.

During data analysis, I reviewed transcripts and field notes and findings and discussed them with participants in order to ensure accuracy. I made all efforts to include participants in the research process, up to and including communicating the findings to participants. I offered each participant an opportunity to speak again, if they were interested, in order to privately discuss the findings of this study. This permitted all parties a chance to review my findings and analysis thoroughly and confidentially.

Measures for Ethical Protection

The target sample for this study were adults who have emerged GP without any formal education beyond high school or obtaining a high school equivalency. Ten adults were recruited and screened for this study; the rationale for exceeding the target range of participants (four to eight) was to guarantee that at least four would see the process completely through to the end. Concerns about attrition were based on the immersive nature of the inquiry and the reality of everyday schedules and commitments conflicting with the schedule of the interviews. Over sampling reduced the concern, but there were still difficulties in finding this specific population. For example, in one case, the individual met the parameters fully, but was reticent to share deeply personal recollections. In several other instances, there was interest from potential participants, but they did not meet the standards of the research exactly. One person, for instance, enrolled in college courses prior to being emerged from GP for five years; another grew up impoverished but her mother did not, thereby eliminating the generational component of the research question.

Qualified participants were interviewed and asked to share their experiences of growing up in GP and their eventual emergence from it. While these individuals do not meet the criteria of an at-risk population as defined by the American Counseling Association's Code of Ethics (ACA, 2005), I still adhered to Section G of the ACA's code in the treatment of the participants in this study. Section G clearly outlines researchers' ethical obligations to safeguard research participants in the design, construction, implementation and reporting of research (ACA, 2005). By obtaining

informed consent from each participant, explaining the parameters of the study, promising confidentiality, and being careful to avoid causing any undue psychological, emotional, social, and physical injury to participants, the goal of respecting ACA guidelines and those participating in this research project was met. The following specific measures were taken to reach this goal:

- Initial conversations clearly explained the nature of this research as well as the scope of the study. Additionally, contact information was provided (email and/or phone number) that allowed potential participants to ask any questions they may have about the survey or the study itself. As part of the informed consent procedure, the nature and scope of the study was reiterated with the intention that participants completely understood their role in the research.
- All efforts were made to ensure that participants did not feel compelled to participate by fully explaining their right to refuse or withdraw from the study at any point in the process. The final consent form was drafted in a direct and easy-to-understand manner (Appendix C).

  For the comfort, well-being, and convenience of participants, all interviews were conducted according to each participant's choosing. Methods included in-person interviews, video conferencing via Skype, and telephone interviews. Every effort was made to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality at all times. The flexibility of the interviewing style permitted an elimination of any physical proximity concerns and the final participants were drawn from a wide geographical range.

- I was prepared to immediately contact a crisis hotline or dial 911 should a participant have exhibited any signs of acute emotional stress or physical reaction to the recounting of life events. In cases of less severe yet significant emotional distress, I was prepared to offer assistance to the participant(s) by concluding the interview early or offering to conduct the interview in multiple segments. During data collection, none of these contingencies became necessary.
- When conducting this study, all ethical guidelines set forth by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) were observed and followed. All research materials and data including transcripts of interviews, audio/ video (e.g., audio/video recordings, interview transcripts, thumb drives or other electronic storage devices, and field notes) were secured in a locked closet in my home. All raw data, as set forth in the IRB guidelines, will be kept for a minimum of five years. Following the five year time frame, all paper data will be shredded. Audio/video recordings, thumb drives, or other electronic storage hardware containing any data related to this research project will be physically destroyed. If the research is to be used in any other fashion, such as future research, participants will be consulted in order to obtain their consent before retaining any materials longer that the prescribed five-year time frame. All digital archives, recordings, and computer data files will be eliminated by deletion. No record or available report (including this manuscript) will incorporate any personal information that could identify participants. The result of the research employs identifiers such as “Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.” in lieu of participants’ real

names. During data collection and analysis, transcripts were saved with generic titles that made no reference to any particular participant; "participant_011, participant_012," and so forth.

Instruments for Data Collection

Two instruments were used for data collection in this study. The screening instrument (Appendix A), was created to qualify participants according to financial background, family of origin, education attainment, and use of social services. A family history of using services including welfare benefits, TANF, food stamps, and government medical insurance programs helped to identify preliminary participants. Additionally, some biographical information of each potential participant was acquired via the screening instrument which was useful in determining viable candidates. Candidates who met the criteria of the research project were contacted via phone and/or email to determine availability and willingness to move forward to the interview process. Of the 10 final candidates, five were chosen as participants and five eliminated. The decision of which five to choose as participants was initially thought to depend on participant availability, location, and other factors most likely to generate full participation. However, the tight scope of the study's criteria eliminated all but seven potential participants. The seven participants moved on to the interview phase of the research project, but two more were eliminated. One declined the intimate nature of the possible discussion and the other could not manage to schedule a block of time necessary to conduct an interview. In the dialogues, the second instrument, open-ended interview questions (Appendix B) were used.

The Screening Instrument

The screening instrument was used to ensure participants met the criteria for participation in the research study. The intention was to evaluate the state of volunteers' past lives and experiences, and to determine the financial status of the individual respondents and their families in order to establish educational and poverty status.

The components of the screening instrument were informed by peer-reviewed articles contained in the literature review and developed by me. The first question in the screening instrument was intended to establish the educational experience of each person: Have you had any formal education beyond high school or obtaining a high school equivalency? A "no" answer permitted me to move on to the next part of the survey dealing with the presence of poverty in participants' lives. A "yes" answer prompted a follow-up question: "did you attend higher education AFTER having achieved financial solvency for five consecutive years? In other words, did you emerge from poverty and THEN seek education beyond high school or obtaining a high school equivalency?" A "no" response from the follow-up question ended the survey and rendered the person ineligible for the research study. A "yes" answer to the follow-up question permitted the individual to proceed to the next part of the survey designed to establish the presence of poverty in their lives and in the lives of their parents.

To accurately determine the financial status of participants during their childhood years, screening instrument questions were structured to gauge the use of social services that require subsisting below government poverty guidelines. (a) When you were growing up, did your family regularly receive food stamps? (b) Were you or any of your siblings

eligible for free lunch, reduced price lunch, free breakfast, or free milk during school? (c) Did your family receive TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), AFDC (Aid for Families with Dependent Children), or General Assistance? (d) Did your family ever receive SSI (Supplementary Social Security Income)? (e) Did your family receive Medicaid? (f) Were you covered under government-supplied medical insurance such as CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program) as a child? (g) Did your family ever receive housing assistance? (h) Did your family receive energy assistance? If a potential participant answered "yes" to any of these questions, then the low economic status of their family of origin was established.

Qualifying for governmental social support programs such as the ones listed above requires that individuals or families do not exceed certain socioeconomic income levels. For most of these programs, the established poverty criteria are one of, if not the only, components of eligibility. Individuals or families attempting to procure aid from such programs would have to prove eligibility via proof of income (paycheck receipts), Medicaid identification card, or written confirmation of funds received from a specific agency, such as Social Security (United States Census Bureau, 2012).

Open-Ended Interview Questions

The researcher-produced instrument that was used to collect data during interviews were open-ended interview questions which were intended to fully answer the specific research question by establishing a personal, thoughtful, autobiographical review of each participant's life experiences. The goal of an open-ended interview format was to assist participants in being at ease in the interview setting and to foster an atmosphere of

safety, confidentiality, openness, and trust. The intention was to create an environment in which each person is comfortable enough to share deeply unique and personal narratives. This was crucial since individual stories provided the data for the research project.

Sequentially, the screening instrument established a broad foundation in order to establish family income, educational level, and some historical data in the lives of each participant. The open-ended interview questions were used to determine specific life experiences unique to individuals' poverty emergence experiences. The first nine questions concerned each participant's individual awareness of their families' economic situation. Questions one through nine of the open-ended interview questions were designed to assist each individual recall in rich detail what he or she experienced in relation to poverty, throughout his or her childhood and adolescence. Questions 10-13 focused upon each participant's view of formal post-secondary education. The final questions, 14-17, centered upon poverty emergence and its impact upon each individual participant. All open-ended interview questions were designed to assist participants in their recall of their specific life events in as much detail as possible. Follow-up questions were necessary as each interview progressed in order to properly elicit responses that offer the most insight into each individual's distinctive narrative. I concluded the interviews by seeking any final thoughts, ensuring participants that their efforts were appreciated, and informing them that follow-up might be necessary if any clarification was needed. It was also made clear during this debriefing that an opportunity to review transcripts and findings would be given to each participant.

Procedures for Data Collection

Data was collected from initial survey screening instrument and reviewed. The volunteers who meet all eligibility requirements were notified of their selection via phone. In initial responses, I sought dates and times for interviews and determined whether the interviews were to be face-to-face, via telephone, or video chat via Skype, Google Hangouts, or another teleconferencing application, based upon participant preference, geographical considerations, and availability constraints. While the goal was to conduct face-to-face interviews, the need to be prepared for alternative methods of interviewing participants arose due to the specific nature of the study. During this step, individual folders (non-electronic) were created for each of the respondents and placed survey information in his or her unique folder. No written materials contained any identifying information. Any non-face-to-face interviews were recorded via audio only and also contained no identifying information. During data collection and note-taking, participants were simply referred to as "Participant one," "Participant two," and so forth; as analysis is reported in subsequent chapters, these generic monikers are used to refer to participants consistently. The date and time for the scheduled interview was recoded on each folder and each of the participants was asked to notify me if scheduling conflicts occurred. All interviews were confirmed, via e-mail, 24-72 hours prior to the scheduled times. Interviews were conducted at places of the participants' choosing, with the requirement being adequate space for a private and comfortable interview. Alternative locations, had they become necessary, were available as options.

All interviews were recorded on a digital audio recorder and notes were taken throughout. A redundant recording device was available for use in case of mechanical problems with the primary recorder. In addition, following each interview I immediately reflected upon the experience in a researcher's journal in order to capture all the minutiae of the experience while it was still fresh.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research technique used to gain insight into how an individual comprehends a phenomenon (Finlay, 2009). Responses given by participants in interviews were interpreted to attain themes germane to the research question. IPA is comparable in method to grounded theory in that I did not start data collection with any hypotheses in place. Rather, the data determined the manner in which the research question was answered.

IPA does not attempt, through analysis, to make impartial narratives, but instead centers on the inimitable view of the individual experiencing the phenomenon (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA is dependent upon steering clear of presuppositions as well as my ability to immerse myself into the life and deeply personal memories of each participant. The interpretive nature of this type of analysis comes when the investigator inductively uses data from interactions with participants in order to answer specific research questions. IPA analysis is subjective, since it is a consequence of participants and researcher making sense of the phenomenon being studied (Finlay, 2009). IPA encourages an unrestricted discourse between the investigator and participants and could,

then, go in unforeseen directions or create additional perspective(s) on the research question.

Information used in analysis came chiefly from one-on-one interview sessions, field notes, researcher journal entries. A study involving IPA analysis characteristically has 5 to 15 participants and features the use of word-for-word passages from the data (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The wide age-range of participants provided an opportunity to examine the consistency of data over different periods of time, which provided a triangulation of sources and enhanced validity of this research project. In order to reduce partiality in this study, IPA analysis utilized cooperative inquiry. Cooperative inquiry is a step that permits participants to concur with or dispute my interpretation of the data (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This step was completed during follow-up emails with participants.

The steps involved in IPA analysis are as follows: (1) reading and re-reading data; (2) initial noting; (3) developing emergent themes; (4) searching for connections across emergent themes; (5) moving to the next case; (6) searching for patterns across cases. Though some steps of the process may appear self-explanatory, rigor demands that steps are carefully and completely executed. Reading and re-reading data involves as full an immersion as possible into the original data generated. A deliberate, slow pace, combined with careful review of research notes taken during the interviews themselves represented "active engagement with the data" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, pg. 82) that brought the fullest possible understanding.

Initial noting was one of the most time consuming parts of analysis because it involved great detail in examining the actual words and phrases used (semantics) and noted anything of interest in the transcript (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Engagement with the transcript was crucial for avoiding superficial reading that supports only broad concepts and could have been prone to influence from bias. The report created as a result of this process centered on an expressive, meaningful nucleus of comments that had a clear phenomenological focus that adhered to the participants' precise meaning. Three types of commenting during the exploratory phase were done: descriptive comments, linguistic comments, and conceptual comments. Descriptive comments noted things that each participant said; significant words, phrases, or explanations that represented the understanding of each person and his or her experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Words each person used that he or she chose to illustrate his or her reality and construct his or her unique narrative were worth noting in this manner. Linguistic comments were used to note incidents of specific language use, metaphor, pauses, laughter, hesitancy, tone, repetition—any aspect of the particular words, phrases, or linguistic devices used by each participant. These were significant to note because they indicated the likely presence of deeper conceptual meanings and provided direction for follow-up questions. The third echelon of notation is more interpretive in nature and centered on the conceptual meanings of the written data—what were the participant's all-encompassing conceptions of the material being discussed (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009)? An example might be moving from discussing the particulars of growing up in GP, such as specific incidents that trigger negative emotions and moving toward an

account of the overarching sense of isolation and shame that possibly accompanied the events. Each type of notation was made in different colors of pen through progressive re-readings of the transcripts. In this manner, a significant set of notes that accompanied the interview data was generated.

Developing emergent themes relied more heavily on the comprehensive set of notes than the interview data, yet the two remained closely related in this process (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). In order to closely analyze the themes that emerged, I broke the transcript up into portions to better focus on specific sections of data. The larger piece—the entire interview—became a chronological arrangement of elements that were reunified as a new whole at the conclusion of analysis and write-up (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This is a demonstration of the aforementioned hermeneutic circle--sections of the research were examined individually and their relationship to the larger whole was explored as fully as possible.

Once emergent themes were identified, I pursued connections across these themes. My responsibility was to map themes according to patterns that emerged during analysis. I recorded emergent themes different colored cards and physically manipulated them on a large workspace. Using an abstraction methodology, I grouped into clusters themes that were analogous (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). For example, since the research indicated a presence of self-actualization among participants, this group of themes was classified under a super-ordinate theme titled ‘self-actualization and resistance to victimhood mentality.’ The methods used for determining connections was

varied and included, along with abstraction: polarization, contextualization, numeration, and function.

Polarization refers to finding relationships between themes that focus more on points of divergence rather than commonality (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This technique can reveal unique or specific patterns that offer a strong basis for organizing emergent themes. Numeration refers to the rate of recurrence of emergent themes in the transcript of the research (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Numeration can indicate the comparative significance of a theme to the participant, though this is not a formal quantitative measure. Within the context of the individual's narrative, numeration is merely useful as an indicator of the importance of themes to that particular individual. Scrutiny of the use or function that an emergent theme serves for an individual could have provided insight. This level of analysis is certainly interpretive and was used judiciously, but its value came not only from discourse and narrative analysis, but also careful consideration of the experiential nature of the data (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

The next step of IPA was moving to the next case and repeating the process outlined above. Next, I carefully studied of all case data was done in order to bring to light any patterns across cases. Super-ordinate themes emerged as data was compared across cases. Not only did this step reveal what was similar across cases, but also showed which themes from one case had meaning (similar or different) in other cases and which themes had or lacked potency. This step could have potentially led to a reconstruction and relabeling of themes or super-ordinate themes (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

This step revealed participants' uniqueness on one hand and their shared higher-order attributes on the other. The culmination of this step was my creation of a table of themes for all participants which illustrated the themes within super-ordinate themes while defining the theme for each participant (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This carefully constructed table offers a deep, comprehensive data set that describes all of the most significant things about each participant in a fitting, ordered manner.

Protection of Human Subjects

Every volunteer was asked to read and agree to a copy of the consent form before answering or even seeing any of the questions on the screening instrument. Individuals who agreed to the consent form and continued to the survey questions (see Appendix C) were given complete disclosure of the research's risks and benefits, disclosure regarding the intent of the research project, and assurances of confidentiality. Volunteers were informed that answers to any and all questions are completely voluntary and that their participation could be ended at any point in the research should they choose to do so. Further, the personal nature of the research was explained as such, due to the fact that recalling private memories may have the potential to elicit strong emotional responses in some individuals.

Additional steps that were taken to protect participants and the university involve applying to and receiving approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for this study. Also, I re-took the National Institute of Health Office of Extramural Research web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants," and received re-certification. I determined that the research met the criteria

for minimal risk, defined as "the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests" (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2013). However, full disclosure was given to each participant as to the nature of the interviews and each was encouraged to consider participation carefully in light of the potential stress that could have been encountered.

Role of the Researcher in Data Collection Procedure

As the sole researcher for this project, I obtained permission from Walden University to conduct this endeavor before proceeding. In addition, I was solely responsible for the recruitment of participants, coordinating interview times and locations, and for all data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Due to the nature of my chosen qualitative research technique, IPA, my analysis involved significant collaboration between myself and the research participants via cooperative inquiry (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). While my recruiting methods were extensive, I was personally acquainted with one of the participants, having been a high school classmate 25 years prior. Likewise, another participant and I had previously worked together and were professionally acquainted. Both of these previous relationships were set aside and were in no way influential on data collection or analysis.

The participants disclosed their unique, subjective experiences with me primarily through one-on-one interviews and the transcripts of those sessions made up the majority of the textual data. Additional data was generated by my research journal and notes. All

interactions between interviewer and participants were a mutual exchange. The conversational nature of the sessions offered the highest level of flexibility in order to follow ideas as they emerged and to most effectively gather as much information as possible (Robert & Shenhav, 2014).

In following the parameters of phenomenological research, I set aside my personal experiences as one who grew up in poverty as well as my experiences with higher education. A bracketing of my experiences was essential to this process in order to immerse myself in the experiences, recollections, and stories of the participants in my project without allowing bias or prejudgment into the process. So as to limit or eliminate bias, I refrained from writing any personal commentary with my field notes and adhered only to the words and actions of the participants. I used the research journal as a means of recording any personal feelings I had during the process and as a tool of reflection to ensure that my data collection remained untainted. Prior to the final write-up, I offered each participant the opportunity to review interview transcripts to confirm that my collected data accurately captured their experiences and points of view.

Summary

A qualitative, phenomenological approach to the research question was essential in order to best understand the phenomenon of escaping GP without formal education beyond graduating high school or obtaining a high school equivalency. In order to achieve an in-depth comprehension of the experiences of different individuals, a narratological paradigm offered the most insight into each individual's life, experiences, conceptions, reactions, and thought processes. Multiple case study construction revealed

similarities and differences between the experiences of the participants as well as consistent themes across cases. The goal in this research project was to understand the uniting phenomenon as fully as possible.

The screening instrument served the purpose of ensuring that volunteers met the criteria of the research study. The set of questions in the open-ended interview questions and any organic follow-up questions that arose in the interviews themselves helped to create a personal, autobiographical narrative that reconstructed the participants' life experiences in regard to escaping GP and his or her educational experiences. While the open-ended interview questions represented only an outline of the interview questions, they served as a valuable tool to help each participant recall personal details about each of their unique experiences.

The distinctive and personal experiences of the participants, gathered from the screening instrument and open-ended interview questions supplied a great deal of data for interpretation. The systematic method for reviewing the transcripts and journal data, as well as any other data generated during the interview processes, was IPA. Following the specific steps of IPA allowed for in-depth analysis both within each case and across the case studies. With careful and considered analysis, producing rich, thick data that offered insight into the phenomenon of emerging from GP without formal education was very achievable.

Chapter 4: Results

Overview

In this chapter, I present the procedures I used for conducting interviews, the demographic information of participants, and the results of the open-ended interview questions. I analyzed participants' views of formal education beyond high school or high school equivalency, and discuss them in detail. While I recorded and transcribed interviews verbatim as part of the raw data, I cite them in this chapter without filler words such as "um" and "you know" for the sake of clarity. My clustering of themes led to the emergence of super-ordinate themes including: circumstance awareness, motivation to change circumstances, work ethic/industriousness, financial wherewithal and anxiety alleviation, and generally positive attitude of participants. With the exception of the next to last theme, all super-ordinate themes have underlying themes accompanying them. I conclude the chapter with observations from field notes and a summary.

Introduction

I undertook this phenomenological study in order to explore the lived experiences of individuals who have emerged from GP without formal higher education beyond high school or high school equivalency. Although there is a vast amount of research dedicated to exploring the causes and effects of poverty, the attention given to very specific populations has been limited in the literature. In order to better understand the progression of this phenomenon, I began by recruiting individuals who may have undergone such a formative experience, using the criteria and methods outlined in Chapter 3. I conducted 50-90 minute interviews with each of the five participants either

via online videoconference (Participants 1 and 5), face-to-face interview (Participant 2), or telephone conference (Participants 3 and 4). I recorded all conversations using an audio-only voice recorder.

Having identified qualitative phenomenology as appropriate for this research, I employed IPA with the steps outlined in the previous chapter. I coded noteworthy statements and then placed them into categories under the themes. I cross-referenced answers to the questions and subsequent follow-up questions by participant in order to logically compare all responses. This efficiently refined the data, since answers to the open-ended questions were not always clear and concise. For instance, a reply to a later question may have been discussed in a previous answer. I used horizontalization of the data to reduce unnecessary and redundant statements, and member checks for both the transcript data and the conclusions I reached to ensure credibility.

In Table 1 below, I note the demographics and various settings for each individual because they provide important contextual components significant for IPA. To maintain consistency following the processes of IPA analysis, I have presented findings as they were outlined in the methodology section. Therefore, following a discussion of the screening instrument information, I discuss the open-ended interview questions using the aforementioned IPA framework.

Demographic Information

The age range of participants was 43-70 years old. The significant age-range provided me an opportunity to examine constancy of data over dissimilar periods of time, which delivered a triangulation of sources and increased validity of this research project.

Three of the participants were in their 40s, one was in his 50s, and one was in her 70s. Ethnic backgrounds of participants were as follows: three Caucasian, one Hispanic, and one unknown, although the participant of unknown ethnic background described himself as "mixed." The gender breakdown was four males and one female.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Age/Gender	Ethnicity	Home U.S. Region/Current residence
1	56/male	Caucasian	Southern Far West/Urban Mid-Atlantic
2	49/male	Hispanic	Urban SW/Central Mid-Atlantic
3	70/female	Caucasian	Rural SW /Urban SE
4	47/male	Mixed-unknown	Urban NE/Rocky Mountain Region
5	43/male	Caucasian	Mid-Atlantic/ Urban Mid-Atlantic

Reviewing the participants' families of origin, I found that three of the five participants reported having had traditional family structures of married, heterosexual parents during childhood; one was raised by family (aunts) other than parents. Participant 4 reported being raised by a combination of mother, foster parents, and a boarding school environment; the presence of his biological mother ended early in his childhood, and the remainder of his life until adolescence was the same foster parent couple and the

boarding school. None of the participants reported any parental deaths during their childhood or adolescence.

All participants reported that parental education beyond high school or high school equivalency was non-existent. All three participants whose families of origin were reported as traditional stated that their mothers had never stated an inclination to seek or ever sought higher education. The participant raised by aunts reported that the aunts did not seek higher education and the participant with foster parents reported that the foster mother did not seek or state a desire to seek higher education. As for fathers or father-figures of the participants, all participants reported that the males in their lives were employed and that none had shown evidence of or verbalized a desire to seek higher education. The participant raised by aunts reported no significant male influence present during childhood or adolescence.

Table 2 represents the level of formal education for each participant beyond graduating high school or obtaining a high school equivalency. All college classes were initially taken after having emerged from poverty for five consecutive years, per the study's parameters.

Table 2

Formal Education Achieved by Participants after Having Been Emerged from GP for at Least Five Consecutive Years

Participant No.	No college	Some college	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	Doctoral degree
1				X	
2			X		
3					X
4	X				
5		X			

All participants confirmed that their parents were raised in poverty and also self-reported that their households either received or qualified to receive government assistance programs throughout their childhood and adolescence.

Results of the Open-Ended Interview Questions

All participants (100%) reported having siblings present in their home during childhood.

Table 3

Siblings in the Household During Participants' Childhood

Participant	Brothers *n*	Sisters *n*	Row Total *N*
1	0	3	3
2	1	3	4
3	1	0	1
4	3	3	6
5	0	1	1

The number of siblings born into families living in GP was reported to have contributed to a greater scarcity of resources within the participants' households. While extended family living in the home might have served to increase income within the household, the presence of extended family within the households of origin of the participants was not a factor since none lived in this circumstance. Participant 4 did live, temporarily, with a grandparent and uncle, but was brought into their environment, not the other way around. Following this brief interlude of several months, Participant 4 returned to his mother's home and then proceeded into foster care and then a boarding school environment.

Both of the homes with traditional parental structures were reported as being positive environments. Participants 2 and 5 mentioned their parents as a source of support, encouragement, and positivity. Describing his home environment, Participant 2 recalled of his childhood family, "We did everything together. Brothers and sisters, so,

we were, are best friends as well as brothers and sisters." He indicated that his parents were still happily married to this day, "Never divorced, still married." Participant 5 stated, "I mean, we were a happy family. In retrospect, yeah, we had food on the table; we were a happy family." While physical needs were sometimes challenging for these households to provide, emotional needs were reported as well-met.

In Participant 1's household where two aunts were the primary caregivers, there was also an atmosphere described as "supportive and helpful." Participant 4, who's biological mother was at first present and then absent, described the parent as "negative," and "not present." Participant 4 also described instances of childhood stress, stating, "Well, I know, like, we never, it was…we hardly ever had any food in the house… My mom would work a lot and I'd have to take care of my little brother." These issues of food scarcity and having to care for a sibling occurred while Participant 4 was only a fourth-grader himself. However, upon entering foster care, Participant 4 was placed in a foster care environment of a traditional married couple that he found to be "just really great people" and described their influence upon him by saying "they probably saved me." No types of scarcities whatsoever were described in the foster care home.

Participant 3 described a negative environment in her household of origin. Despite the presence of a traditional married couple, the environment was described as "ignorant of the outside world." The heavily religious rural community was described by Participant 3:

> It was hard because the lack of education and the poverty and the rural, rural area that we lived in. The only source of entertainment was the church. There was no theater in town or restaurant or anything like that, no bowling alley.

This religiously fundamentalist environment, coupled with crippling poverty and an insular, analogous community, created an atmosphere described as "stifling" to a young girl.

The presence of organized religion was not mentioned by the majority of participants. Participant 1, however, did state that the religious influence in his life was as important as other positive influences: "I recognized that I had to stay on top of it [job searching] and I also couldn't do it by myself, I needed the support of other people and also an element of faith and God that I believed in." Participant 1 repeatedly mentioned the constructive presence of faith in his life including an allusion to a faith-based program that affected him positively: "I was involved in various faith-based recovery groups, if you will." When speaking of his personal journey out of GP, Participant 1 said of the most influential factors: "I would say faith. Faith and hope. And that is both in people, family members and others I was very close to, and also my religious affiliations." This indicates that Participant 1 had formed strong connections to faith as well as family and community.

None of the remaining three participants mentioned anything of a religious nature during interviews. Participant 3's views concerning religiosity were overwhelmingly negative in the context of its influence on her home environment and that of her community of origin; however, she also made non-committal, if not positive, comments

when referencing a potential superior Being. “I had a very high IQ and that was just a gift from God. Or whoever, whoever you believe in,” was a comment that demonstrated her capacity to allow for the existence of a higher power as well as her own tolerance.

Four of the five participants, notably, have military experience. While this is not surprising, it deserves to be noted as a significant factor. The opportunities offered through military careers, especially to those individuals who do not have education beyond high school or obtaining a high school equivalency, likely make this option especially appealing to those in GP.

Table 4 represents the highest educational attainment level of participants’ primary caregivers, during participants’ childhood/adolescence.

Table 4

Participants' Parents and Caregivers' Highest Level of Educational Attainment

Participant No.	Educational level of father (Kindergarten-12 or Beyond) *N*	Educational level of mother (K-12 or Beyond) *n*	Educational level of other caregiver, if present (K-12 or Beyond) *n*
1	N/A	12	12
2	12	8	N/A
3	4	6	N/A
4	N/A	12	12
5	12	12	N/A
Average level =N	9.3	10	12

Considering the parameters of this research, it was unsurprising that the educational level of participants' primary caregivers was below grade 12 completion. Table 4 offers a comparison of parents and caregivers education level. In the three cases of traditional family structures, the mothers received slightly more education than participants' fathers. In the two non-traditional environments, all caregivers completed high school.

IPA Structure and Analysis of Open-Ended Interview Questions

According to the development of emergent themes, transcripts were broken up and reorganized along thematic lines. The clusters of themes yielded five super-ordinate themes and several underlying themes. The headings under which super-ordinate themes

were examined across cases were: circumstance awareness; motivation to change circumstances; work ethic/industriousness; financial wherewithal and anxiety alleviation; generally positive attitude of participants. Due to the nature of the phenomenon and the mindset of each participant in regard to formal education, scrutiny of their attitudes toward formal education beyond high school or obtaining a high school equivalency must necessarily be taken into account prior to delving into super-ordinate themes and underlying themes.

Attitudes of Participants Regarding Formal Education

The perception of formal education in each of the participants' lives is necessary for a thorough examination of the phenomenon of emergence from GP without formal higher education. The open-ended questions regarding formal education sought to examine the role, importance, desire for, and the reality of not obtaining formal higher education. Additionally, participants were asked to discuss any relationships they may have had with peers who were able to continue formal education beyond high school.

Participants gave varying accounts of the importance of education during their childhood and early adolescence. Participant 1 said:

> Education was stressed as the way out of [poverty], but I had never been up to that point a very good student. And in high school I started occasionally hooking class, that sort of thing. I started doing some other things that were not productive or were negative. But I never stopped, going to [high] school. I just didn't see, I knew that college was different: you didn't necessarily go every day, or have the

> same kind of schedule but the classes would be more difficult and I just did not envision that as something that would work for me.

Participant 2, able to attend a private school because of need scholarships available for poor families, credited the nuns and a priest at his Catholic school with keeping him involved academically as a child. Additionally, his mother volunteered at the school in order to assist the English as a second language (ESL) program, which kept Participant 2 engaged in school throughout high school. Participant 3 had a more stressful experience:

> I was very, very bright. And my parents did not believe in education for a girl. They did not, and you'll see this still in a lot of the Amish, and the Mormon, by the Mormon I mean the fundamental Mormon, polygamy, where there's no reason for a girl to have an education. Why would a girl get an education? She's just going to marry a man and he's going to take care of her. And so my parents just did not at all believe that a girl, there was any sense in a girl going past the eighth grade. And when I went to high school, they immediately because of my high grades in grammar school, put me in all college elective courses. And my mother drove to the school, one of the few times she ever went to the school, and said "oh, oh no this isn't…You are going to put her in just enough courses to get her through home economics" and just, just to get the degree out of the way because they didn't believe in it. And it was, it was just something I wanted desperately, to go to school. And my parents, my mother kept me home from school two or three

days a week just to do the laundry or to put up jam and jelly because they just didn't see any sense in a girl going to school.

Participant 4 had a far more dispassionate response to schooling during his childhood:

Participant 4: I had missed a lot of school, I forget how many days, and almost failed the school year [5th grade]… But we [Participant 4 and his brother] had missed, I don't remember the amount of days, but I know that it was a lot in the first half of the school year.

Researcher: OK. So how important do you think, then, was formal education to everybody around you, such as your immediate family, your extended family, and your peers?

Participant 4: I don't think anybody really cared about school then.

Participant 5's reply indicated a moderate stance toward education on his parents' behalf:

Well, the, I think only that they followed the education system pretty much. Our parents wanted us to, they wanted us to do our homework, they wanted us to study, I recall allowance, what little allowance we could get, would be tied to grades and chores around the house and stuff like that.

While the level of engagement and enthusiasm for school on behalf of both participants may have varied, the acknowledgement of the potential of formal education to positively impact their futures was made by each of them. However, during their adolescence, the desire to continue formal education beyond high school was present in only two of the five. Participant 3 expressed a strong desire for education, which she reported was thwarted by her mother. When describing the aftermath of the previously

mentioned incident where her mother prevented Participant 3 from enrolling in college courses she said:

> Oh yeah. I cried. My counselor, I still to this day remember his name. He begged her not to do it, he begged my mother not to take, to please put me in the college courses, because I could go on and I could, become a nurse, because that was a really, [laughs] a dream job for girls.

Participant 3 reported that her desire for higher education never waned. The reality of education beyond high school, though, was extremely unlikely:

> It was a, it was just a dream. It was just something that I knew that people had, and, I didn't dream of, it was just a far off dream like someone might dream of someday going to Paris or something. Because I just couldn't see it ever happening for me because no one in my circle-- I didn't even know anyone with a college education other than our teachers.

Participant 5 also expressed a desire for continuing his education beyond high school and stated that his primary motivation for enlisting in the Navy was to acquire the college benefits of doing so. Participants 1,2, and 4 did not report a desire for continuing their education as children or adolescents, but 2 described the feasibility of college aspirations as “a dream.”

As adults, participants’ way of thinking varied in regard to higher education. There was no attached shame or embarrassment for Participant 1 in not choosing to move forward educationally at that time, but there was a choice to advance in some positive way:

> I think I was okay with it. I think doing *anything*, whether you went to college, whether you got a job, or went into the military; as long as you were doing *something* was kind of OK. If you are sitting around doing nothing, that wasn't so acceptable.

Presently, Participant 1 is an advocate of formal education beyond high school:

> I can see the, concretely, I can relate to it and understand it, it's not an abstract concept as it was when I was a kid. It was, I heard "get your education, go to school, do well" all that, it was kind of very abstract to me. It became much more concrete when, I became an adult and started competing in the job market. And why this one gets this, and this one doesn't get that, and sometimes there are other factors, work experience and all that. But education absolutely was, is, valued by, employers, and so I was able to relate that to why I've been able to do some of the things I've been able to do.

When asked to expand on the latter portion of his statement, Participant 1 reflected on the benefits and potential benefits of formal education, according to his adult mindset:

> And, going to school, it opened up opportunities and talking to other folks and hearing what they were doing in their lives, made me think about, a little bit more about maybe some things I hadn't really thought about previously. I guess I thought about my idea of taking a trip might be going down the Caribbean for a couple days or something. It never occurred to me, that I might go to China with an academic group… those were things that were completely different for me. So it's really, it's almost like a building block. Everything builds on everything

> else and it just opens up more avenues and more ideas… I might want to live in Barcelona for a year and teach online or something like that? And these are ideas that I would never, I wouldn't have thought about maybe 10 years ago.

Participant 2 understood the value of education as an adolescent and young man but approached the acquisition of it pragmatically. He acquired it piecemeal, when and where he was able to do so after having emerged from GP for several years:

> They, [parents] they mentioned: "what are you going to do, do you want to go to college?" And we said “yeah, I would love to, I would love to go to school.” Then they told us: "you gotta pay for it. [Laughs] We can't afford it so you will have to pay for it." So, I have been going to college, I took two classes, almost two classes a year for, oh my gosh, almost 20 years. I mean, I graduated with over 200 credits.

His experiences have lent him perspective, he stated, especially in regard to his role as an educator and what that means to him personally, helping young people decide which path to take into adulthood:

> I just got finished giving a talk at the school, about nontraditional, nontraditional path to get to your goals and talked about the long way around. And don't worry about rushing into college because there are so many kids that rush into college, that...Yeah, I mean, I've had two of them that they graduated with me as a, as teachers, they can't find a job and so now ones, she works in daycare. And the other one, no wait, she's a physical therapist now, she switched from day care to physical therapy. And the other one is a dental hygienist. And they still don't

> know if they want to stay that, so I'm trying to teach my kids that hey, you don't have to pick something right away, just have a general idea and just love what you do.

Formal education beyond high school remained important to Participant 2, even if the acquisition is non-traditional. In his own home, he reported that his philosophy influences his parenting as well as his profession:

> The other side I see, the great advantages of going to school and getting an education and getting a better paying job or for me it's just because I have been a lifelong student. I'm always encouraging them, continue going to school. Continue learning, learn something new every day. One thing, pick something I learn something new every day if you can. So for me, I guess it's the teacher in me. It's just that value of education. So I'm always telling them whatever you do, even our oldest, he works at [factory] we keep telling him, "Why don't you start taking a class here and there?"

Participant 3, throughout the interview, expressed a passionate appreciation for and advocacy of higher education. As an adult, she has pursued multiple educational opportunities and is an educator herself who holds multiple degrees:

> I have 8 degrees. And if I could figure out a way to pay for a third doctorate, I'd do it again. I really, I heard, one of my very first professors said there are only two ways you can change your life station: one is by marriage, and that is fickle because if the rich spouse decides that he or she doesn't want you anymore, you are no longer rich [both laugh]. He said, or education. And he, I'll never forget

> that because it was one of the very first classes that I ever took, and he said, "that's it; if you want to change your life station that's it." So I just started taking every class, every course, adding every certification--I just kept going…Yeah. It was something I wanted as a young girl, desperately wanted, and it was withheld from me by my parents. And then once I was able to do it, on my own-- and I might add, that my parents were so against it that I was not even allowed to speak of the fact that I was in college in their presence. My mother did not acknowledge that I had a college degree until I had my first PhD… It was just almost shameful that a girl would go to school. Then, suddenly, when I got my first PhD, then it was, "oh now she's a doctor now we can talk about it." [Both laugh]

Participant 4, as an adult, indicated a belief that some sort of education or training is needed, be it college or otherwise, in order to be an asset to the workforce. Education for its own sake was not mentioned outside of the utility of acquiring it:

> I think you need some kind of education, it doesn't matter if it's vocational or, or college, you need something more and not just one thing. You should have two or three things because the job market is, and life in general, it always throws curves at you and if you have something else to fall back on there's always-- it's a good thing. Not just to set your standards at one, like "oh I want to be this and that" because the way society is now, you could wait 20 or 30 years before you ever get to that point, so you've gotta keep a wide range of options open. You might go left

> to get back to where you want to be in the end anyway, but it's, you can't just stay...it's never a straight line anyway, I don't think.

Similarly, Participant 5 questioned the utility of obtaining formal education as it relates to professional development, and also signified that he remains somewhat ambivalent or even skeptical toward the value of formal education at this stage in his life:

> I think it's morphed over time. And I think it's not so much to me on the value of education or…but so much as to individual to individual who present themselves. Because, again, most people that I deal with high degrees are usually commissioned officers and, the life like that in the military. Now, granted, nowadays, there's...case in point: yesterday I'm doing a career development board, I'm chairing that for a first-class Petty Officer, which is an E-6, and he's getting out of the Navy here, retiring by late spring. He's got two Masters Degrees!...And I'm sitting there smiling, going "well, I can tell you the courses that you are retired to do in order to exit the Navy, but you've got two Masters degrees, I can't really tell you what you need to do with your life, because you pretty much already got that thought very well through and already set up for your next phase of life." So, it's more prevalent now I think with the advent of internet or distance learning type of environments. So I think that that's a good thing. But I also think simultaneously that it's kind of diluted the well. And I say that because people are saying "hey! You need to..." I could very easily and very quickly amass the amount of credits probably to attain an Associate's if not a Bachelor's degree in health care administration. Well, in the Navy, I tell you, excuse the expression,

but you can't swing a dead cat without hitting someone with a Masters degree in healthcare administration. So to me, you have a saturation of those degrees in the market, so how viable was that career path?

In summary, the view of higher education for four of the five participants has not significantly changed from their adolescence: Participant 1 is the only individual who has shifted in his view, from ambivalence to concrete value. Participants 2 and 3 wanted higher education as young people and have obtained it since being fully emerged from poverty for at least five years. Participant 4 did not indicate any desire for education apart from the functionality as it relates to the workforce, and Participant 5 has shifted slightly from a tepid desire to obtain it to doubting the usefulness of acquiring higher education.

Themes and Super-Ordinate Themes

Analysis of the research data yielded five super-ordinate themes, each based on their own cluster of underlying themes. The five super-ordinate themes were: negative emotions associated with circumstance discovery as a child or adolescent; desire to change circumstances; industriousness/work ethic; financial wherewithal and anxiety alleviation; generally positive attitude of participants.

Circumstance awareness

In all of the narratives, it was significant to note the consistency of the emotional impact of circumstances on each participant during his or her childhood and adolescence. I used numeration was used to note the importance of themes which participants described:

Table 5

Mentions of or References to Emotional Responses during Realization of Circumstances During Childhood/Adolescence

Participant	Positive remarks *n*	Neutral remarks *N*	Negative remarks *n*
1	3	2	14
2	3	1	11
3	6	2	5
4	3	2	7
5	9	3	10
Total =N	24	10	60

Positive remarks: Experience lent strength (n=4), taught perceived value of the following: working (n=7), saving (n=5), not living in the past (n=4), helping others (n=2), and resisting self-pity (n=2). Neutral remarks: Expressing equality of self compared to others (n=4), expressed belief in comparable skills/competencies of self compared to others (n=3), verbalized that poverty emergence was possible for anyone to achieve (n=3). Negative remarks: humiliation/humiliation/embarrassment (n=18), frustration (n=7), anxiety/worry (n=7), jealousy/envy of others (n=5), resentment towards family of origin (n=3), anger (n=2), depression (n=1), isolation (n=1), decreased worth (n=1), desire to flee (n=1), desire to act out/fighting (n=1).

Scarcity/material inequality awareness.

Responses to becoming aware of circumstances of poverty within each of their lives showed consistencies across participants' responses. Only two of the five participants described food shortages or hunger as an indicator of poverty; by and large basic physical needs were met. The aforementioned comment from Participant 4 in

regard to not having food in the home indicates this shortage. In a similar way, Participant 2, when describing a weekly visit to extended family members nearby said:

> They had chickens. So Saturday they would kill a chicken for us and we would have fried chicken and we would watch that TV, and even though it was just wrestling, the commercials were just fascinating to me. And then on the way home we would get a ten-cent frosty. I don't know if you know what a frosty is--an ice cream. And that was, because we did not have meat the rest of the week. We just had vegetables from the garden. And my aunt Twilight always fried that chicken and made a cake and that was our, that was a rich meal for us. That was rich.

All five mentioned material shortages, however, as indicators, especially attire. While the timing of such awareness varied somewhat, all participants stated that their awareness came during childhood, usually around age nine.

Table 6

Age of Participant Awareness of Poverty

Participant	Age of Awareness of Household Poverty
1	8-9 years old
2	9-10
3	9
4	9
5	12

Polarization revealed that three of the participants had relatively positive home environments and two had difficult ones, yet all reported anxiety and stress in social and school settings. Participant 3 cited as an example of her becoming aware of her family's poverty encapsulates her emotional response very distinctly, despite the fact that it occurred 62 years prior:

> I think the first time it hit me is when I was in the third grade. I, I just now thought of this, the teacher asked everybody to bring in a bar of soap to carve an animal? For art? And we could not afford a bar of soap. [Pauses] And I remember being so embarrassed. That I couldn't, ah, that I didn't have a bar of soap that I could bring to school.

Participant 1 expressed that his school-age years were "frustrating" due to financial limitations:

> I felt that we were poor in a middle-class neighborhood...Some things, like little stuff, school dances or something, might just be a couple bucks, but at some point I just got tired of asking. Because I knew what, "well, ask them if there's any financial aid available"…We did feel it. And it was, it was a depressive kind of feeling.

While Participant 1 did not recount any incidents of threat, bullying, or violence in high school, the information given during the interview was that of a young man eager to emerge from the confines of it: "I knew that I couldn't wait to get out of high school…I couldn't wait to get out and find a job; I wasn't sure what I was going to do but get a job and have some things."

Feeling "different" than other kids was mentioned unanimously, with clothing and footwear shortages mentioned in all narratives as indicators of peer inequality. The home and school environment for Participant 5 were significantly different than one another in that he experienced a positive home life and a more difficult school setting. Of his home life he said:

> I mean, we were, we were a happy family. There was always food on the table…like I said, retrospect, yeah, we had food on the table, we were a fairly happy family so I can't say there was a major obstacle there.

When asked a follow-up question regarding what contributed most to his happy home environment he offered:

> I remember there being ups and downs in the family, and I'm sure that's common for everybody's family. Marital arguments between parents now and again, stuff

> like that, and sometimes that would be over financial stuff. But, I think that we spent time. I remember some of my best memories of being younger was going camping. Doing things in the outdoors, going hunting with my dad, things like that. Although my mother, she wasn't a big...like to go out hunting but there was always some kind of support role that she would always try to play. Whether, if we went camping there was always soup or hot chocolate waiting when we got back.

Yet, despite a happy home environment, Participant 5 struggled socially in school, saying the following in response to a question about dealing with poverty-oriented obstacles or challenges during adolescence:

> I think it was more, at least for that, emotional-wise, I would say that you felt different from the other kids. You felt like it was…you saw other, other kids going around like, as I said, different things and it was like "well, why don't we have those things?"

Participant 1 described becoming aware of poverty via contextual shortages as well:

> Other kids, I saw them, they had bicycles, they had clothes that looked new, these sorts of things. I became aware maybe in the sixth grade or thereabouts. Patched jeans or patched clothes weren't really seen where I went to school so I stood out just a little bit.

Participant 2 also mentioned attire as an indicator: "Oh, growing up we knew, because of everyone else being in the school? My brother is in sixth grade, and I would be in third

grade but I'm wearing his clothes." Participant 2 expanded on this further when asked about specific indicators of household poverty:

> Wearing the same shoes for almost two years [laughs]. That would be the biggest one. Just the clothes that we wore, or how my mom made them. Like, if you saw any of our pictures, we were all like *The Sound of Music*. Clothes made out of material from the drapes, or at least that's what it looked like. So most of it was homemade clothes, hand-me-down bikes.

Both references, of homemade clothing and hand-me-down clothing and possessions, were echoed by other participants. Participant 3 said:

> And so the kids from the real rural poor area, we were not only marked by the way we dressed and--store bought clothes was something that was just very rare. Our mothers, my mother made almost everything I wore. And she was a beautiful seamstress, I mean she could do just about anything with clothes, but it was just never the same as what the kids in town wore.

Similarly, she spoke about her shoes as an indicator of poverty:

> If you think back to *American Graffiti*, that's kind of the high school years I grew up in. And those kids didn't wear mama made clothes, they had really nice shoes and we never had decent shoes. We got two pairs of shoes: we got a pair of shoes at Christmas, and we got a pair of shoes at Easter. And, those shoes were supposed to make it year round, and they rarely did. So, for a girl, clothes were the big factor because other than what I got from babysitting money, everything went to clothes. And pantyhose weren't invented in those days, so you wore

> nylons. And you had to wear them. This was in an era when girls didn't wear slacks to school; you wore skirts, so you had to wear nylons every day to school. And in those days, I still remember, a pair of nylons was a dollar, which--today they are a dollar! And the least little thing, you got a run in them. So nylons were just cherished. And you, it was embarrassing if you got a run in your nylons, so you had to have nice, fresh nylons every day. And so, $5 a week for nylons, that was more than I made in a week of babysitting.

Participant 4 recalled footwear as a poverty indicator similarly:

> Um, like, we, we couldn't, like most of the kids, like a lot of the kids had new sneakers and stuff like that, we always got the, if we got sneakers they were like the stuff from K-Mart or stuff like that for $5 or $10 maybe? I don't remember how much they were back then, but they used to call them "bobos"? And I used to get made fun of for that…they called them bobos, they were like the cheap sneakers. Like if you were poor, that's what you wore.

Participant 5 described clothing and material shortages in this way:

> Ah, I probably didn't understand when I was quite younger but I want to say it was probably more junior high/high school that I started to really understand. Because it was just one of those things: you see other kids with clothes, shoes, stuff like that, that... it was just one of things, hand-me-downs were more common, where it could be between siblings, in my family, considering that my oldest sibling was a sister, I'm a middle child so it was just...maybe like backpacks, or things like that where she was no longer using it, providing it was

> not purple or something like that, where they could pass down to me. There was a lot of stuff like older clothes or whatever, that when I got bigger became hand-me-downs to my younger brother as well. So, that was kind of when I realized was, well, "why do these kids have things that we don't?" It was just starting, that's kind of where I was just getting a little more aware.

Four of the five participants used the phrase "hand-me-downs" when discussing clothing and materials passed down from others. Significant indicators used to characterize the sub-theme of scarcity/material inequality awareness that emerged across cases were: method of realization of impoverished circumstances at a young age; clothing and material shortages; unavailability of disposable income for goods or entertainment, especially in context with others outside of the household. Clothing and footwear shortages and discrepancies seemed to hold more significance to participants not only because of the scarcity or need represented by their amount or quality, but because of the emotional consequences of how those discrepancies set them apart from their peer groups, especially in school and social settings.

GP-related anxiety/negative emotional response during childhood and adolescence.

The most often cited sources of embarrassment, anxiety, stress, or related negative emotions were reported as occurring mainly in school for all participants. For some, this was juxtaposed to home environments described with positive stories. For example, Participant 2 recounted a supportive home life due to positive family relationships:

> We [siblings] did everything together, so, we were best friends as well as brothers and sisters… It [being poor] actually made us stronger… It made us strong because we worked for everything. I mean, if we wanted something we were going to have to work and save.

The sense of family and camaraderie was referred to during Participant 2's narrative was identified as an emotional buttress against detrimental psychological effects. This also carried over to his school experiences during childhood and adolescence. Participant 2 described his school experiences with adults as generally positive and nurturing, perhaps due to the fact that he and his siblings were able to attend a private Catholic school because of need scholarships. He stated that the nuns and priests at the school were "very supportive. The nuns gravitated to the poor kids and wanted to help us."

Despite the positive environments of both home and school, Participant 2 still expressed anxiety and discomfort at material shortages. When relating his mother's attitude toward her children decrying their circumstances, he said:

> When we would, as children, my brothers and sisters, if we would complain "man, I'm just so sick and tired of being poor" because we couldn't get something new or because you couldn't have what other friends have? My mom would smack us in the back of the head [laughs] or just take the belt to our butt because she was dirt poor. She grew up in Nogales, it was actually a shack. We'd go visit our grandma in Mexico and it's funny: she is sweeping the floor and its all dirt… no running water, no plumbing. In her [mother] opinion, if we complained, it was like "you have got to be kidding me!"

The recollection indicates frustration with the circumstances of GP, especially in the context of social relationships, even if the mother attempted to remind her kids that theirs were not the worst circumstances they had observed.

Similarly, Participant 5 had a positive home life despite GP but struggled socially in school because of it:

> And kids can be, can be rotten too and it was kind of like, you don't have the best, the newest things, it was, there was that psychological aspect of being picked on with that kind of stuff.

Participant 5 also talked about how the material shortages created by GP made him feel as if he had less worth than his peers in school settings:

> Ah, sometimes it was easy, a lot of times it was hard. Because it made it difficult to really get to know people, it made it difficult to socialize with people; it made it...it made things uneasy. But, again, kids are kids… I think it was just more; at that point, that you didn't feel like you had the same worth as other people… I think ultimately it was one of those, more of those things to where it was more...you were more embarrassed that you weren't doing the same things as other people were doing. That, I think that's probably the best way to phrase it.

Participant 1 described a home environment that was comparatively more neutral in terms of happiness, but was still a positive environment in which to grow up. Reflections in his narrative that indicate an appreciation of the home created by his aunts were present, as were appreciative remarks regarding the spiritual heritage his home life

established for him. However, he did also use the word “depressive” and “frustrating” and expressed an eagerness to escape his circumstances during his high school years.

Participants 3 and 4 both had negative home and school environments which added to their feelings anxiety during their childhoods and adolescences. Participant 3’s aforementioned embarrassment surrounding the soap carving school project when she realized the poverty in which she was living, attributes significance to the prevalence of an oppressively religious home and community atmosphere:

> It was sort of Pentecostal, but it was far, far on the fringes of Pentecost. Where the snake handling and the Brush-Arbor things where they believe in casting out devils and all that? So it really set me apart from the group [in school]. They didn’t believe in makeup, they didn’t believe in cutting your hair, they didn’t believe in dancing and so when we had to go to high school, we had to take a bus to the next nearest town where those kids were a little more affluent.

The religious atmosphere also led to Participant 3 marrying young, further limiting her options: “And I wanted to get away from that abusive ex-husband, that religion. I knew if I left him, I had to leave the church, I had to leave my parents, I had to leave everything--and I did.”

Prior to leaving her home, her hardships caused her multiple incidents of emotional discomfort:

> It was really embarrassing if you had holes in your shoes or if you had a rubber band or a shoestring tying the sole of your shoe to the top of your shoe so it didn’t

> flap. And that was just really humiliating. But if those are the only shoes you had, that's what you had to wear. And so that was really bad. It was rough.

Participant 4 described a tumultuous home and school life, which involved living conditions in flux and a lack of stability prior to being placed in a nurturing foster care home and enrolling in a boarding school. His anxiety manifested itself, as an elementary school student, in violent acting out: "I got in a lot of fights, and we [Participant 4 and his brother] did some stealing." The fights were reported by Participant 5 as being primarily racially motivated conflicts, described as commonplace in his inner-city elementary school:

> I was one of the only lighter kids in the school [laughs]. It was me and, like, there was maybe four of us, in the whole school? And pretty much the rest of the school was black, and my brother, is black. Is half black so it, it was, that part of my life, I was fighting daily just because of the color of my skin. So, when I went to [boarding school] everybody was different. There's like no 90% black, or 90% white, there was a mix of everything, so it wasn't...there was no, I guess, no bullying or anything because of color.

The negative attention he received due to his material shortages ("bobos" comment earlier, referring to his inexpensive sneakers) coupled with his racial inequality were the impetus for the fights, according to the narrative. He also described his relationship with his mother as negative:

> I held a lot of resentment toward my mom… When I joined the military I hadn't talked to her or probably my brother for like almost ten years…Because my mom

> had to sign the paperwork because I enlisted at 17, And when I, because I graduated young and she had to sign the paperwork but then once I joined the military I was, I like, left and I just left. Everything was behind me and I really didn't go back.

The sibling relationship deteriorated between Participant 4 and his brother due to a perceived inequity of treatment from their mother. When asked if the brother had done something specific, Participant 4 replied: "Well, no, not really him per se, it was my mom. She always favored him over everything… And it was a lot of that which caused a lot of animosity between him and I."

Despite the negative descriptions of the emotional impact of the experience for participants when they were children or adolescents, as adults, there was an absence of resentment toward families of origin in all participants' recounting of their individual stories. In addition, those who referred to schoolmates in the present tense also did so in only positive terms. Lingering animosity was simply not evident whatsoever. Additional contextual data in regard to participants' adult perspectives will be discussed in further detail in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Motivation to Change Circumstances

During data analysis it became clear that despite the inaccessibility of higher education all participants verbalized a desire to change their own circumstances. All stated that they possessed a drive or a will to emerge from GP regardless of obstacles. While this realization came at different times for each of them, there were similarities across narratives.

Influential others: effect of non-family member(s) significant to participants.

In every participant's story, there was mention of a single non-family member or members that had a positive emotional or practical impact on his or her life. In four of the five cases, the impact was described in language that indicated that this positive outside influence was quite considerable. This is categorized as a sub-theme of motivation to change circumstances because in every case, the influential other (IO) served as a facilitator, impetus, or inspiration for participants to make, continue, or intensify behaviors in his or her life that moved him or her away from GP. Since an IO is present in each narrative, the details in the individual narratives are presented here in ascending order of perceived influence, according to my analytical judgment. In examining the perceived effects that the influential outsider (IO) had upon the feelings, mindset, choices, and behaviors of participants, the least impactful IO was an US Army Recruiter that affected Participant 1:

> I got a couple of calls, one from a Marine recruiter and one from an Army recruiter. And I blew off the Marine recruiter but I showed up for the Army guy. He made an impact on me, for sure. And we talked a couple of times, and in a very short period decided that that's what I wanted to do, and I proceeded to do that.

The IO in participant 1's case was perceived to have had an impact, but the effect itself was narrow in scope. There was no continuing relationship either professionally or personally with the recruiter, and the Participant did not revisit this individual at any other time in the narrative. The long-reaching effects, however, include the perceived

benefits of military service to the Participant. He credits his experience in the Army with providing skills and networking opportunities that served him beyond his time in service:

> And, somebody suggested that I try a temp agency and, if I try this particular temp agency, especially in light of my military background, that I might get assigned to this district government agency and it's possible that it could become a permanent employment. And in fact, that's exactly what ended up happening. I went to the temp agency, my third assignment was to a DC government agency, and several months later I became a permanent district government employee.

The perceived positive impact for all other participants was more conspicuous in the research data. Participant 2 credits the Catholic school and specific members of that organization in his home community with a tremendous positive influence:

> In fourth grade, everything started getting better. When they moved us to the Catholic schools, I had Father Mike who became like my best, one of my best friends, even though he was much older. But he, he took care of all of us, all my brothers and sisters. Made sure that we learned, and we got what we needed, clothes-wise; the backpacks, school supplies-- somehow it always managed to be on our doorstep.

In further discussing the positive influence of Father Mike on his life, Participant 2 also told of experiences he perceived to be enriching to his life thanks to the presence of this IO:

> We did things, activities with the church. We had a priest, a family priest who was really close to us. Still is. We would go to California with him, he would take my brother or I somewhere, we'd drive with him and just go to California, go to the other churches and just help them out…And he, that's, he knew that's pretty much what it was all about, just to get us out and away.

The IO in this instance was not only offering a travel opportunity to Participant 2, but was attempting to show him something of the world, an alternative to the impoverished home and community that comprised the participant's worldview at that time. The IO was not limited to Father Mike, however, because the other educational/spiritual component to his schooling were the nuns, female members of the religious community who dedicate their lives to their faith and serve as teachers in many Catholic schools.

> The nuns, they're the ones who impressed upon us what we needed to do to improve. They always used to tell us: "your parents want more for you. They always want more for you." So they're the ones who helped us a lot… It was kind of like going into high school, you were either poor or you were rich. That was it. And you could always tell, because the nuns always gravitated towards the poor kids.

Later in the interview, Participant 2 reinforced his comment:

> Researcher: What do you think has helped you the most, and it can be, ah, multiple things, of course, what has helped you the most to make the exit from generational poverty? To break that cycle?
>
> Participant 2: I would say the nuns.

Researcher: Really?

Participant 2: Yeah, the nuns helped us the most.

The significance of the IO influence has led to Participant 2 becoming an educator and undertaking to help disadvantaged students in his own school.

> Sometimes I find myself harder on those who claim that they are poor. But I will be one of the first ones to show them how and help them out. We will be one of the first to help them get out, get out of poverty. And so, even at school, I gravitate towards the lower end kids. Just because I want to help them get out…There's a lot of them that say: "well I want to go into the military." It's a way out. It's a great way out, you get experience, they'll pay for your schooling while you're in there, and while you're out if you take the GI Bill… They'll teach you a lot of jobs too. If you're not going to college, they can still teach you a lot of things. And some of our students, the whole family went. All three sons went to the military. And it was nice when they came back and they thanked us. And they said "it's because of you." "I went into the military because of you." And it's like, well what are you going to do afterwards. "We don't see us leaving." [Laughs] And it's like, "OK! That's great." But that's…that's their way out.

Having benefitted by the presence of his own IO, Participant 2 is seeking to take on that role for others whose formative experiences are similar to his own.

Participant 3, who was married at 16 and separated and moved away from her husband at 17, recounts her IO experience with a neighbor who was brought into her world via happenstance:

> As fate would have it, when I was pregnant with my daughter I lived in this little house and these people, a man, a wife, and their son, moved into a rental next door to my house while their home was being built and they turned out to be quite wealthy. And that woman, she was 10 years older than me, and she was beautiful; she looked like a movie star. And she, she just kind of took me under her wing, she was probably lonely, and we visited almost every day. She showed me her clothes, she showed me how to put makeup on, she had a college degree and her husband did. And I would say that that woman just absolutely changed my life. I was 16… And then she drifted away and I never heard from her again. She doesn't even know this. But the few months she was my neighbor was really, was really something. And she showed me the potential of money and everything; how to dress, how to wear your hair-- she just really transformed my life. She was probably the first quote unquote outsider I'd ever met.

The transformative nature of this brief relationship reverberated throughout the young adulthood of Participant 3. Her subsequent divorce and feelings of "empowerment" reinforced her decision to move beyond the confines of her insular town and toward true independence. Not long after the relationship with her IO, Participant 3 described her mindset:

> I knew I wasn't going to live like that. I knew that I personally was not going to be poor. I knew that I could not live hand to mouth like that. That whatever I had to do, like if you remember in "Gone with the Wind," she's out digging raw potatoes or turnips out of the field? And she said "as God as my witness, I will never be

> poor again!" [Both laugh] I was kind of a, that was kind of me. It was like "this is not going to work, this just isn't working for me." Not having enough money for groceries, and not having enough to feed your baby. I just, it was sheer-- I just told myself "this isn't going to happen. I'm not going to stay poor, whatever I have to do." I just wasn't going to accept that lifestyle.

Her narrative is noteworthy because, at the time, she was facing multiple hardships as the single mother of a newborn and she had no formal education beyond high school.

Participant 4, as mentioned previously, was placed in foster care and his foster parents became the dominant IOs in his life during childhood and beyond. While he did attend a boarding school, he went back to their home for holiday and summer recesses, continuing to reside with them until graduating from high school. Asked to identify the biggest influence on his exit from poverty, Participant 4 said:

> I would say my foster parents. That they, I think they probably saved me…Um, they were really good people. They did a lot for, for just a lot of people. They did a lot for me… I don't know how to describe them, they were just great people.

As the interview wore on, he recounted specific incidents of his foster parents being a resource for developing character traits that aided him in his emergence from GP:

> A lot of, growing up, a lot of people [and] peer pressure and all of that, never really bothered me. I had friends that smoked and I didn't smoke because they smoked or they smoked weed and I never..."Hey come on!" [and I said] "nahh." I've always been, I guess, I think about what I do and a lot of that comes from the foster parents that I had. And I think they were a tremendous influence on a lot of

> my decisions…Any time I needed any kind of advice, can you help me with this or whatever. And a lot of it, like, I was, my foster parents talked to me about a lot of stuff, they talked to me about the military when jobs, at that time, when I came out the first time, jobs were really hard to find, like after my first two years. And then my second enlistment in '92, and then, by that time I had already made E5 and they're like "you're already so far, why get out?"

Like Participant 2, the relationship with his IO continued throughout Participant 4's childhood and adolescence. Unlike the others, Participant 4 maintained a relationship with them throughout his early adulthood until the end of the IO's lives.

Participant 5's IO reached out to him early on in high school:

> I mentioned earlier that you didn't feel the same worth as, in yourself, as other people. And honestly, that part did change for me in high school. I remember that clearly. A teacher- OK because I didn't think I was as smart or as good or whatever as a lot of people in school at that point in time. So, I remember that I didn't challenge myself. I didn't go for the academic courses because I didn't think I was smart enough. And I remember going to a general biology course and… there was the teacher who was there specifically... And he pulled me aside and he, at one point, he says "why are you here?" And I had no idea what he was asking or why, but he came over to me and he goes "you barely do the homework, I'm not sure how much you really are paying attention in class, but you come in here, you take the tests, and you blow it out of the water. You're the one setting the bell curve. Why are you in my class?" And I looked at him funny and he goes "you're

> too smart to be in here." And that was the first time I ever remember that in my entire life. At that point in time, I started to realize "you know what? Maybe I am good enough. Maybe I am just as good as all of these other guys." And, so yeah, that part of it too had to play into it-- you have to have at least some modicum of self-confidence or at least self-awareness or understanding of hey look, you *can* do it.

The description offered by Participant 5 was similar to the others in that the encounters were recounted to express an awakening for each participant. Each seemed to have his or her view broadened or altered by the influence of his or her IO and all participants recalled the incidents with clarity and ease.

Realization of capabilities.

Most of the participants recounted moments of recognizing the potential of their own capabilities such as innate talents and abilities. While there were not always sudden moments of clarity (i.e. "aha!" moments), becoming conscious to the fact that they had the capacity to alter their GP circumstances was consistently relayed as a discovery of empowerment in each narrative. As Participant 5 recounts in the above IO example, there was a moment for him when he realized he had at least as much intelligence or ability as the peers he had always considered superior to him.

Participant 4 noted a realization not of his abilities, necessarily, but of his own potential areas of weakness. Just as with the earlier example of resisting peer-pressure, this knowledge of self, in his estimation, helped him to avoid likely pitfalls:

> I would have went to college and got all these loans and everything to do college, I would have failed out because I would've hung out with the wrong people and would have partied too much and stuff like that. So that's why I took the alternate route by joining the military.

Participant 3 understood that she had talents or abilities that might benefit her in relation to emerging from GP: intelligence, work ethic, and the ability to function on fewer hours of sleep than most people:

> I never needed much sleep, which was probably my salvation, and I was very healthy. And I think when you have a baby and you have to work a lot of hours, if you are not healthy and you are not ambitious, then you don't....If you can get by on a little bit of sleep, I think that goes a long way to keep you going.

These abilities directly contributed to another realization that had a long-lasting positive impact on her life:

> Most of the waitresses I worked with were working their way through college, so I really got to know a lot of college people, and that was the first time in my life that it ever really crossed my mind that I could actually go to college. When I saw, when I was working side by side with waitresses who were going to school full time, and working as a waitress full time and managing both, and they were actually bringing me their papers and asking me to correct them for them…And that's when I went "you know what? I can do this."

When Participant 2 made the decision to join the Air Force, he had to, as all potential military recruits do, take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test in

order to determine specific duties he was suited to perform. His results were revelatory to him: “And the guy was like “you’re off the charts." You can take whatever you want.” For Participant 1, the journey was more gradual and was still ongoing even after poverty emergence. Upon high school graduation, he had “some nebulous ideas” about potentially continuing with “some kind of school further down the road,” but he doubted his own potential to be successful. Only through his military and professional experience did he come to the gradual realization that he had an aptitude for higher education.

Perseverance.

The effect of an IO and realizing that one is capable of changing one’s own circumstances may not have been enough for participants to emerge from GP without education beyond high school or obtaining a high school equivalency. Nearly all of them indicated that a measure of perseverance was needed in order to make their personal journey. Participant 1 used the word perseverance directly, relaying a part of his history when he had difficulty finding worthwhile employment and was forced to endure his circumstances patiently:

> Perseverance, absolutely…It's very difficult when you go through processes, you put in resumes, you fill out applications and all that and seemingly nothing happens. Your situation has not improved. Its, it’s...and that happened for quite some time. It took a long time for, to eventually get some leads that panned out.

Similarly, Participant 2 drew on his experiences in GP in order to persevere through a difficult time later in his life:

> That's when we knew, or even my wife and I-- we struggled. Through all this time, we almost lost the house, but I think because right after we left the school [former workplace] and then tried to get a job as a teacher there was no… the jobs weren't there. And so when we almost lost the house, she's panicking and I'm like "hey, it's no big deal, we'll just go move here or just live here" and, I mean it was like falling back into my childhood.

Participant 3 recounted, as already mentioned, multiple stories that indicated perseverance, including escaping her hometown and oppressive religion and family. She also discussed persevering through job stresses and single motherhood. Participant 5 summed up his ability to persevere very simply: “There are going to be challenges and then you just gotta take a step back, regroup, and re-engage that same situation and move on.” This sub-theme correlates to aspects of resilience and will be revisited in the following chapter.

Work Ethic/Industriousness

Participants all reported a high level of personal work ethic and verbalized their not only their willingness to work hard toward professional and personal goals, but cited examples from their experiences.

Laboring as children.

Three of the five participants reported working as children. Participants 2 and 3 stated that their income was intended to benefit their households. Participant 2 reported helping his father at the print shop where his dad worked and when asked about what challenges or obstacles he faced during childhood as a result of GP, he answered:

> Having to work at a young age, we all [siblings] did. I mean, besides my dad trying to find ways to get us to work so that the money can stay in the home. I actually started working at 12. At odd jobs, janitor jobs, dishwasher. My brother did the same.

Participant 3 stated:

> My older brother and I, we went to work. We picked fruit in the summer to buy school clothes. And we worked all summer long picking fruit in the hot, hot sun. And that was our school clothes. And then, my brother, he mowed yards, he painted houses, he chopped wood, and I babysat, and I ironed, I went over to people's houses and cooked, very young: 10, 11, 12 years old. So I started working very, very young. If you count the summers picking fruit, I started working at about age five… then I started working cleaning houses in babysitting by 12.

Although later in the interview Participant 3 indicated that some of her childhood earnings were accessible to her for certain needs, Participant 2 never alluded to this being his reality.

Participant 4 referenced working as a child alongside is brother, and was the only participant to reference illegal behaviors (stealing mentioned previously) as a means of addressing wants and needs:

> We worked at like little places for money so we could get stuff, me and my brother. Like grocery stores, we'd stock shelves and stuff like that, when we were

young, like under the table stuff. So, anything to make money here and there so we could buy candy and stuff like that.

Participants 1 and 5 did not reference working as children or adolescents during their responses. Participant 5 did reference his childhood in relation to work ethic in this manner, however: "I want to say also: work ethic. Work ethic was huge. That was the one thing my dad beat into my skull from a kid."

Willingness to work in a multitude of roles/doing "whatever it takes."

Participants verbalized little or no reluctance when discussing specific employment histories or their willingness to do whatever necessary to avoid poverty in their lives; no job was characterized as being too menial. In fact, for Participants 2, 3, and 4, this aspect of their character was stated with discernible pride, based on verbal and non-verbal cues. Participant 1 made no such declaration but did refer to an incident long after he emerged from GP and had obtained some higher education, when he felt compelled to accept a job that "was kind of a low grade given my educational achievements." He stated that it was favorable to being unemployed and kept him from descending back into poverty at that particular time, and his tone conveyed gratitude. Participant 5 went straight into the Navy from high school and remains in service as of the time of the interview, so he has not been in a position to seek other employment outside of the military. However, he did express that his willingness to work hard and take on various tasks within the military has served him well. In the interview, he twice categorized himself as a "workaholic."

Delving deeper into this theme, Participant 3 shared the following when speaking about her readiness to work at whatever opportunity presented itself:

> So I just worked. I just worked as much as I could. As did my brother. There my brother was really, he was older than me and he was really generous with what little money he had, too, because I would wash his car for him, I'd run his bath water for him. There was no polyester in those days so I would iron all his clothes for him, and he would pay me.

This work ethic continued when she struck out on her own, infant daughter in tow, as a 17-year old divorcee:

> And so I just worked constantly. And then, I was very smart, and very hard working, and by the time I was 23 I would say that I pulled myself out of poverty. Because I finally figured out, that waitressing, if you, that was a profession that in those days, if you worked really hard and you were really good, and you had a tremendous memory, you could make really big money. So I'm at work in one restaurant morning shift and then I might cocktail waitress at night. And made pretty good money.

Participant 4 had a similar attitude:

> Well, I, for me I know that I won't due to the fact that I'm going to do what it takes to make enough money to do that..I don't want my family to go through what I went through. So, that alone keeps me...if I have to go out there and clean toilets or whatever to keep them from doing that, that's what I'll do.

His attitude of ensuring usefulness extended to his military career as well:

> In the military, in the military I learned a lot. I have, I don't use them now, but at the time I have like, tons of certification for cooking and stuff like that. But those, over time I learned stuff like that. I learned how to ice carve, cake decorate, I can do all that. But not limited to what type of job I can get, per se…Because I've got a logistical background, I've got a food service background, I have management, I can-- I'm very versatile.

This motivation and "whatever it takes"-type of thinking were observed in the tone, demeanor, or statements of all five participants and strongly relate to perseverance as previously mentioned.

Financial Wherewithal

Regarding what signaled an emergence from GP, participants unanimously answered in terms of the basic presence of financial resources; simply having a monetary reserve. Though there were differences in what their financial solvency was able to secure, according to the inclinations of individual participants, it is a meaningful point of similarity. Participant 1 stated:

> I guess, having a bank account, being able to do, do some things. Go shopping and if you need, if you see another pair of shoes that you like, you can get them. Within reason, being able to afford the things that the material things and not and also mentally not being worried all the time about "do I have enough money to pay the utility bills" or not having to juggle accounts, who's gonna get paid and who's gonna get put on hold and all that kind of stuff.

For Participant 2, mobility was significant but meeting financial obligations was also: "When we could travel. Having some money and just being able to go places. Travel across the United States and actually pay our bills on time." Participant 3 reports using her money to acquire education, but also mentions the importance of having some level of financial reserves:

> Participant 3: Then, as each year, as I learned and I progressed, and started adding degrees and getting professional jobs, the savings, getting a savings account. And then when, then when you reach a point when you don't have to count the days until you are paid again…Where a payday-- it just comes and goes and you don't think about it. Because when you are poor, you really count the days until you are paid.

Participant 4 does not mention specifically what he seeks to acquire, but, again, stresses the very presence of a pecuniary cache:

> My, first...probably...it took me awhile in the military, because when I first got in I was still pretty poor. Probably a good five years after I joined the army and I started saving and being able to just...going to the store and I could just buy what I needed and never had to worry about counting how much money I had or whatever, because I had enough money in the bank.

Participant 5 had a similar experience:

> Ah, I don't think that there was really the "aha!" moment, I think that I realized that, when you're initially in the military and you're single, you're pretty much confined to barracks living. So, I'd have a room that I'd share with one, sometimes

> two other gentlemen. That pretty much ended, I want to say roughly about, yeah, 2001. Early 2001 would have been the best timeframe on that one. And I say that because I had just graduated from a year-long [Navy training] course out in San Diego, I got roughly $35,000 as a bonus for re-signing in the Navy after completing that course, so I want to say after that, that was probably the point that I was kind of like [exhales emphatically] "OK, I'm fine."

"Unburdened" response to emergence from GP.

More so than the presence of the money, however, is the end to money-related anxiety that accompanied each participant's initial solvency. The perceived removal of that burden is present and significant in every narrative. Field notes reinforce this; in all five interviews, some physical or auditory manifestation of relief or joy was noted.

Table 7

Physical/Auditory Indicators of Relief or Happiness when Participants' Recounted their Individual Moments of Emergence from GP

Participant	Physical/Auditory Indicator
1	Smiled, laughed
2	Smiled and shook head, exhaled emphatically
3	Laughed
4	Exhaled emphatically
5	Exhaled emphatically

Abstraction of the interview data led to this theme of "unburdening" regarding initial reactions to GP emergence. In fact, the revelatory nature of the individual accounts, when viewed as a whole, followed the same basic pattern:

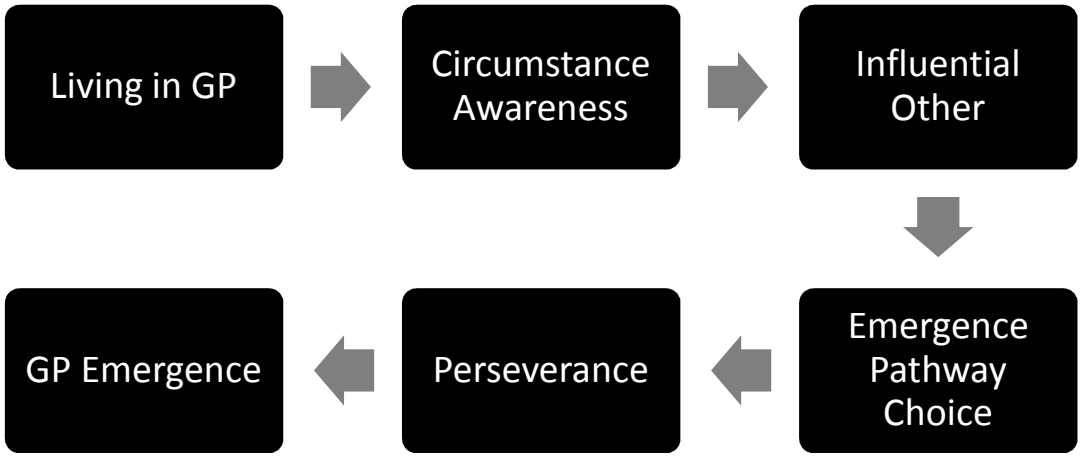


Figure 1: Process of participants' emergence from GP.

The unburdening response marked the emergence from GP phase for every participant. Accompanying this was a feeling of empowerment in which each participant felt he or she had a newly-acquired sense of control over his or her own fate. The reality that had, until this phase, made up their lives entirely was now altered by their own actions. This break from the succession of past events was reported by each as a milestone in his or her life and will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

Generally Positive Attitude of Participants

Throughout the data gathering process, the participants conveyed positive spirit and confidence. There was no underlying sense of arrogance or superiority, however, but each seemed at ease with their accomplishments and buoyed by their experiences. This positivity was conveyed in a multitude of ways during information gathering.

Experiences relayed as unremarkable and attainable.

Coupled with the realization that they had the talent and ability necessary to emerge from GP, all five participants spoke of their experiences as well within the abilities of others. When asked about what the experience of emerging from GP without the benefit of higher education beyond high school or obtaining a high school equivalency had taught him, Participant 1 said: “I don't think that I did anything that other people can't do. I think of myself as pretty average in a lot of ways, I don't think that I'm necessarily real special.” Participant 4 responded to the question in a comparable way: “A respect for life in general and to realize that, no, nobody is better than anybody else. It's just what you make of it; you can change yourself and your surroundings.”

Similarly, Participant 2 spoke about the ability of others to emerge from poverty:

> Everybody can do it. There's a way out for everybody, you just have to find the way out. And so for me, I mean, I don't know if I sound like... sometimes I find myself harder on those who claim that they are poor. But I will be one of the first ones to show them how and help them out. We will be one of the first to help them get out, get out of poverty.

Participant 3 concurred that individuals have it within themselves to change their own circumstances: "I think anything that is physically within your realm, you can do it if you are determined enough and you set your priorities on that focus. I really believe that." Participant 5, responding to a question about what was most important in his mind in making an exit from poverty: "I think the first thing is, you can't let it slow you down."

Self-actualization and resistance to victimhood mentality.

In conjunction with the sub-theme of attainability and the "anyone-can-do-it" mindset, participants also expressed a level of skepticism or frustration, although not negativity, toward a victimhood mentality on the part of others in poverty. Though this may seem out of place in the context of positivity, all of the references to such a mentality were done in a constructive and encouraging manner; no participants were dismissive or disparaging toward the poor. They viewed their emergence as an act of self-actualization and determination via abilities and accomplishments, well within the reach of other people. Their frustration was with the lack of belief in self that they perceived in others and the propagation of such a mindset in the American culture—the participants seemed to want to shout their "anyone-can-do-it" message to others and have it heard

and, more importantly, believed. For Participant 1, making the transition begins with taking responsibility for oneself: “Being aware that, that you, that you are responsible essentially, the individual is responsible for your own career, what you're going to do.”

Participant 2 echoed the notion of personal responsibility being essential for emergence from GP:

> No matter what you'll be able to make it. There's no reason why you can't make it, put it that way. There's no reason why you can't make it out of poverty. You have to want it to make it out of poverty. Or you could sit there and wallow in it and so, I mean, when I hear somebody say "oh I'm just so poor and I can't do this," or " I need to live off the government because I just can't make it.” I just sit there and shake my head and say “that's not true. You can! Everybody can do it.”

Likewise, Participant 3 said:

> Um, I don't have a whole lot of tolerance for people who just sit back and play the victim. I don't have a lot of tolerance for that. Because I've learned that, if you want, I believe that life is all priorities. You set a priority and you will have that.. Whatever is your priority you will do. And it may be alcohol; it may be cigarettes, you now, whatever it is. And everybody has them, and I think they are subconscious in [some] people. But I think if you can take your priorities and make them up front in your life and then just hone in on that and focus on that and you can do it.

Participant 4 summed up his view in the following way:

> And as long as you want to work hard and get it, you don't have to be strapped down to “oh well, because my family's poor, I have to be poor." You can change that. And it's all about will-- if you want to do it, you can do it.

Finally, Participant 5 the most important aspect of emergence from GP was:

> You can't have a mindset of a-- the best way to phrase it, I want to say is a victimhood mentality…Yeah, OK, you don't choose what you're born into, you don't choose what, ah, what cards you're dealt, you do choose how you decide to play them from there… I want to say too, personal responsibility, strong decent work ethic, and understand that not everything is going to be fair initially; not everything is going to be smooth sailing.

This belief in self-determination and overcoming obstacles has been transformative for the two educators in the participant pool, since both of them have chosen careers in which they have influence on young people. Participant 2, in particular, actively seeks to assist the more impoverished kids in his classes; much like the priests and nuns did for him during his school days. As for the remaining three, all were forthcoming and referenced a willingness to share their experiences with others.

Lack of resentment.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, at the end of the section dealing with negative emotions associated with circumstance discovery, all of the participants expressed no resentment towards people or circumstances from their past. While some spoke honestly of harboring resentment or struggling with some negative emotions during the process of being in or emerging from GP, as adults who have fully emerged from it, none spoke

negatively. The experience, when discussed retrospectively, was couched in very positive attitudes in all cases. The paucity of negative language goes beyond simple politeness or professionalism in an interview setting because the participants chose to voluntarily emphasize optimism, learning from experiences, and the transferability of their knowledge instead of speaking derogatorily about people or experiences of the past. Participant 3 discussed the abstract concept of religion non-judgmentally and referred to her intelligence as a "gift from God," despite her early struggles with her family's oppressive type of religion. Participant 5, offered insight to go along with his earlier pronouncement regarding dealing with and getting over challenges:

> One, you can't dwell on what happened in the past because that doesn't necessarily direct your future. Secondarily, is that, OK, you've learned to forgive and move on, on various things. Because the things you may have perceived as slights back at that time, once you move on realize look, everyone was dealing with their own issues. It wasn't about you, it was about where everyone was at, at that point in time. I also, I think that, again, it's not dwelling on what happened before, it's what can you move on to; what can you make out of it. That whole proverbial making lemonade out of lemons bit.

Reinforcing the image of a positive perspective and the importance of learning from past mistakes, he went on to say:

> But you have to have at least a little bit of optimism in order to move on past that. I mean, you don't forget what happened, you don't forget where you come from, you learn from it. OK, don't make those mistakes. Or, what can you do if you're

raising a family or about to start a family, how can you set things up ahead of time so that your, your kids don't run into the same exact situations that what you recall from back when you were younger.

A Potential Model of Emergence from GP without Higher Education

This research project was very limited in scope--only five participants. The data suggest, however, strong similarities in their pathways to emergence from GP. These similarities, due to participants' demographic information, would not be attributable to geographical, ethnic, age, or gender consistencies. Some characteristics are present in most of the narratives, such as military service in four of the five. However, this could be interpreted as simply choosing the best employment/career option available to each participant. When considering the stories of each, the pattern outlined in Figure 1 is consistently visible when superimposed on the arc of the narratives. This could represent a common pathway to be tested and the viability of this as a potential model will be compared to the literature in chapter five.

Observations from Field Notes

During interviews, notes were taken almost continuously. Apart from mention of field notes earlier in this chapter, careful review of the field notes has contributed to all of the super-ordinate themes and underlying themes. Field notes were an effective tool for capturing non-verbal cues, tone of voice, and physical characteristics of participants (when applicable) during discourse. When discussing formative years with participants, most spoke with no visible or auditory discomfort; all were matter-of-fact in their patterns of speech. Their narratives were offered willingly and openly. Participant 2 was

demonstrative with his hands when discussing both his mother's desperately poor upbringing as well as his own willingness to reach out as an educator to his impoverished students. Participant 3 expressed audible frustration (emphatic exhalations and sighs) when discussing some of her female students. When referencing girls in her classes that were born to immigrant parents, she revealed that they mentioned their family's expectations they eschew higher education in exchange for marriage and motherhood—much like Participant 3's own formative experiences.

As for the observations regarding a lack of harbored resentment towards foundational experiences and individuals from their past, this section of field notes was most significant. The tone of voice, commentary, and body language was similar in every case. Calm, sympathetic, and kind were written as specific descriptors of participants' words and demeanors. The participants conveyed a sense of being at peace with what they had endured, and did not express residual feelings of blame for their beginnings. Participant 3 used the phrase, "they were just ignorant." This was said to assure me that there she perceived no malice in her parents' actions, just a forgivable lack of knowledge. Likewise, Participant 4, who admitted to being resentful as a younger man, stated that he held no anger toward his mother now that he was an adult. While this is to be expected from an emotionally mature person, I found the consistency of the reactions to be noteworthy.

Summary

The five participants who participated in this research project offered varied accounts of their emergence from GP without higher education. The participants, four

male and one female, were geographically and ethnically varied and had an age range of about 27 years. While their attitudes about higher education were also varied, three of the five have gone on to college after having been emerged from GP for at least five years. Four of the participants also report having served in the armed forces during their lifetimes.

The themes that emerged from analyzing the data were significant across cases: all reported their circumstances being a source of anxiety during scholastic and social settings as children and adolescents. All indicated materials such as clothing or shoes being an indicator of economic differences between them and their peers. Each participant recounted the presence of an influential person or persons outside of their families who positively impacted them in some way. All reported a measure of capability and perseverance during his or her journey of emergence from GP. The participants all indicated a strong work ethic or high level of industriousness as well as strong feeling of relief when emergence from GP was perceived. All participants presented themselves as positive individuals who strongly believe that their journey can be reproduced by others in GP. All five individuals decry the notion of any sort of "helpless victim" mentality on the part of those in poverty, and none of the five verbalized any resentment towards people from their past.

Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of the findings and conclusions of this research study. The chapter also includes an examination of the potential model for emergence from GP introduced in chapter 4 and the compatibility of that potential model with the current literature. Next, the implications for social change related to this research

are examined and recommendations for future studies are offered. Finally, there is a section dealing with my reflection on the research experience followed by a conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Overview of Findings

This final chapter contains an overview and interpretation of the findings, as well as an examination of the potential model for emergence from GP introduced in chapter 4. I also discuss implications for social change, and offer suggestions for action and possibilities for further study. Finally, I reflect on my experiences as a researcher and conclude with a summary.

In this study, I aimed to accurately capture the lived experiences of individuals who have emerged from GP without the benefit of higher education beyond completing high school or obtaining a high school equivalency. In order to achieve this goal, I was careful to bracket my own personal experiences with childhood and adolescent poverty and to maintain a state of epoche during interviews and analysis. The research question guiding this study was: How do individuals born into generational poverty that earn only a high school diploma or high school equivalency certificate perceive their emergence from generational poverty? In fully answering this, the participants offered detailed narratives that indicated perseverance, strength, self-actualization, and resilience throughout their individual journeys. Although their circumstances differed somewhat in regard to home environments and opportunities (i.e. starting points), the processes and rationales of participants ultimately emerging from GP shared many features. What I was discovered during analysis of the narratives was such a degree of similarity that a potential model of behavior emerged.

Interpretation of the Findings

Themes and Theoretical Lens

As previously discussed in Chapter 3, resilience refers to the ability to overcome risk and hardship with comparatively positive results. Resilience is the capacity and adaptive means of overcoming anxiety, trauma, and difficulties while maintaining normal psychological and physical function (Russo, Murrough, Han, Charney, & Nestler, 2012; Rutter, 2006, 2012, 2015; Wu, Feder, Cohen, Kim, Calderon, Charney, & Mathé, 2013). Resilience indicates a fortification from circumstances or the act of overcoming stress, hardship, setbacks, or trauma (Garmezy, 1974; Rutter, 2006; Rutter, 2011, 2012).

Rutter's resilience theory was the lens used for viewing those who successfully emerged from GP without education beyond a high school education or high school equivalency to gain insight into the processes for these participants. Rutter's (2015) research on resilience stresses processes rather than distinct traits that help individuals surmount or avoid altogether the potentially destructive effects of stress. Rutter (2011, 2012) has defined resilience as resistance to environmental risks or the overcoming of adversity, and as a relatively good outcome despite vulnerability or traumatic experiences. Simply stated, resilience is successful functioning despite the presence of high risk (Fraser, Richman, & Galinsky, 1999; Garmezy, 1974; Rutter, 2006, 2012; Wu et al., 2013). Resilience can present itself as both behavioral and a way of thinking, and it can be proactive and/or reactive. In order to focus this research project on specific processes in Rutter's theory rather than attempt to broadly interpret it through his comprehensive study of the subject, I limited the study to in-depth examination of

process components. Specifically, I focused on process components including: the "steeling" effect, turning-point experiences, and the breaking of negative chain reactions and the formation of positive chain reactions in resilient individuals.

In this context, the experiences of the participants all shared the positive outcome of emergence from GP. All shared the presence of specific vulnerabilities, hardships, and/or risks as children and adolescents. I used IPA to analyze data, which led to the emergence of super-ordinate themes across cases: circumstance awareness, motivation to change circumstances, work ethic/industriousness, financial wherewithal, and the generally positive attitude of participants. Participants became aware of their circumstances chiefly through scarcities, be they basic (Participant 4's food shortages or Participant 5's inability to procure a simple bar of soap for a school project, for example) or in comparison with peers at school in the form inadequate or inferior clothing and shoes. Additionally, most participants were compelled to find employment as children, which they reported as a source of stress during their youth. This awareness and its subsequent anxiety can be viewed as the first step in the process of resilience. Resilience is a conclusion based on data that some individuals have a better result than others who have gone through an equivalent level of hardship (Rutter, 2006, 2012, 2013, 2015). Resilience is not a single trait or cluster of personality traits, but rather applies to patterns and not individual people. In sum, all participants reported hardship, struggle, and anxiety, establishing the fact that they had taken the first step in the resilience process as defined by Rutter.

Focusing on the process components of Rutter's theory, then, necessarily leads away from themes and super-ordinate themes in and of themselves, and shifts attention to how they fit into the process for the participants in this study. Given the research parameters, I considered the process in terms of the following characteristics: turning point experiences, the steeling effect, and the breaking of negative chain reactions and the establishment of positive chain reactions. While unique, there was a general consistency among the participants' narratives of their lived experiences. However, while all their stories followed a similar trajectory, some process components happened asynchronously.

Turning Point Experiences

The presence of influential others (IO).

In all five cases, IOs served as a turning point experience for participants. Rutter (2013) defined such experiences as those which cause major positive changes; the experiences are part of an active chain of events that included both a severance with the past and an active seeking of new prospects. The interactions with the IOs led each participant to consider circumstances and possibilities in a different way. As I noted in Chapter 4, representative phrases in the narratives when participants discussed IOs were noteworthy (in order, Participant 1 through 5): "he made an impact on me;" "the nuns helped us the most;" "that woman just absolutely changed my life;" "they saved me;" and "I thought, 'maybe I am good enough.'"

Realization of capabilities.

In addition to their experiences with the IOs, participants also had other turning point events that opened up previously unavailable opportunities to each of them. Two made careers of military service after discovering that the military offered a challenging and satisfying way of life. Whereas one originally saw military service as gainful temporary employment and the other viewed it as a stepping-stone to higher education, the discovery of an array of career paths was a turning point experience for both. The other three participants pursued higher education after the turning point realization they had the aptitude to complete degrees--what was once described as an unattainable dream was later actively sought. In keeping with Rutter's theory, a lifelong approach to resilience processes observation is necessary due to the turning point effects in adult life (Rutter, 2013).

Willingness to do "whatever it takes."

A final component to discuss in this section is the presence of a "whatever it takes" mentality for the participants. This theme permeates the entire theoretical focus of this research, and is present in both the steeling effect and in the breaking of negative chain reactions/establishing positive chain reactions. Following turning point experiences and the realization of capabilities, each participant underwent a conscious and deliberate process to make choices aligned with his or her desire to emerge from GP. In some cases these were decisions that could be deemed positive, while in others, the choices were avoidance measures. Rutter (2015) notes that a type of feature connected with resilience can be "predicated on the basis that risk and protection must be measured with respect to

their *effects* rather than appearing inherently negative or positive in nature." In this research, choices made by participants that could be viewed as negative--for example, Participant 4's choice to not go on to college and his decision to cut ties with his mother and brother--ended up having an overall positive result. These alternatives, in a context without a risk component, might appear to be either neutral or perilous to Participant 4. The former could have denied him a profitable educational opportunity and the latter would generally be viewed by most people as a devastating loss. However, Participant 4 recognized his own susceptibility to failing out of college and the fact that a continued relationship certain family members would be deleterious to him emotionally.

Another clear instance of this was Participant 3's challenge of leaving everything she formerly knew at age 17 with her infant daughter in tow, and attempting to establish a new life for herself. The turning point of making this decision was monumental, entailing divorce, exile from all friends and family including her church, as well as an arduous physical move with extremely uncertain prospects. Features of this decision were certainly risky in the absence of the even larger risk of continuing in GP and remaining in a stifling marriage and community that devalued its female members. This gendered fundamentalism was a significant motivation for her move because the views or desires of those in vulnerable positions within her community (i.e. women and children) were excluded and infringed upon and their basic freedoms suspended (Davies, 2012). This dramatic turning point was recounted by Participant 3 with her "Gone with the Wind"-like declaration to herself when she vowed to herself that she would overcome her origins and never be poor again.

Steeling Effect

Perseverance.

Rutter's "steeling" effect is described as the presence of stress or anxiety which in turn leads to a future inoculation or resistance to negative effects of similar stresses (Rutter, 1999, 2006, 2012, 2013, 2015). In social science research, Rutter cites and builds on the work of Stacy et al. (1970) that observed, non-experimentally, that children who experienced positive separations from parents, such as slumber parties with peers or spending the night with relatives, were better able to cope with the more complex anxiety related to hospital admission.

In each of the cases studied, the steeling effect manifested itself repeatedly in regard to perseverance. In all narratives, the individuals spoke of their perseverance as a choice, rather than an automatic reaction, implying a learned response from earlier experiences. Participant 1 relied on earlier ordeals in order to endure a job search during a particularly challenging stage in his professional life. Participant 2 spoke of recalling or "falling back into" the mindset held during his time in GP as a coping mechanism when dealing with the possibility of facing financial hardship as an adult. Participant 3, prior to her vivid turning point moment, cited perseverance as a key factor in her being able to endure challenges, such as laboring and managing the oppressive nature of her home community, as a child and young adolescent. Participants 4 and 5 referenced perseverance traits as helpful during their military careers.

Willingness to do whatever it takes.

The steeling effect was also evident in the participants' willingness to work at virtually any job or endure almost any circumstance in order to preserve their emergence from GP. Through working as children, some knew that a willingness to put forth effort and time ensured income that could keep them out of poverty. Participant 2 and 4 specifically mentioned this willingness repeatedly, and 4 commented how he would "clean toilets or whatever" to prevent his family from experiencing the hardships he had to bear. Other examples of this mindset were: Participant 1's acceptance of a position for which he felt he was overqualified, Participant 3's willingness to work at and excel at multiple jobs as a single mother, and Participant 5's realization that past negative experiences could be educational and had little or no bearing on future outcomes.

Generally positive attitude of participants.

The lessons learned by Participant 5 were echoed by all in the cohort studied. No participant indicated any cynicism or negativity at any time during the pre-interview, interview, or post-interview phase of research. In their descriptions, all were upbeat and seemed eager to share their personal stories. Consistencies among the narratives included reflective passages where each participant related a sense of learning from his or her experiences that negativity in regard to personal outlook had a detrimental or inconsequential effect on his or her emergence from GP.

Self-actualization/resistance to victim mentality.

Instances of the steeling effect in regard to self-actualization/resistance to victim mentality were present across all accounts. This is unsurprising since participants were

reared in GP environments and emerged from them in large part independently. Their perspectives, then, are influenced by their personal experiences of self-actualization. Having been exposed to GP conditions and desiring to change their circumstances, participants' narratives displayed development in areas such as planning and self-efficacy (Rutter, 2015). Participants planned alternatives to higher education such as joining the military or workforce and working successfully. Furthermore, they demonstrated self-efficacy by using their abilities and efforts in a thoughtful and deliberate manner. While trial and error may have certainly been present, the pattern observed indicated purposeful actions.

During their recollections, all participants discussed their emergence from GP in terms of achievability and comparatively easy replication. The actions they took were a direct result of their earlier experiences and demonstrate Rutter's steeling effect. Their achievements were conveyed in tones of humility and as commonplace events. As such, four of the five expressed similar attitudes regarding others in GP: if I can do it, surely others can. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this sentiment was not expressed without compassion or empathy, but more as simplistic (perhaps overly so) if/then conditional statements. Still, I detected that the participants were not being flippant but rather expressing frustration towards those in poverty or GP who appear to have the ability to transcend their circumstances, (not limited by disability or other impediment) but for whatever reason do not. The four participants who stated this expressly did so by expressing doubts about individuals who willingly take on a "victim" classification. The chief characteristic that seemed to frustrate participants was the perceived passivity and

poor choice-making ability of such individuals. The empathetic nature of their resistance to a victim mentality will be further discussed in a subsequent section.

Breaking Negative Chain Reactions/Establishing Positive Chain Reactions

Willingness to do "whatever it takes."

The breaking of negative chain reactions and establishment of positive chain reactions is a key component of Rutter's (1999, 2006, 2011, 2012) resilience theory. The definition of this element is fairly straightforward: resilient individuals frequently display a tendency to end negative cycles of behaviors and establish alternative, more beneficial behaviors throughout their adolescence and/or their adult lives (Rutter, 1999). Individuals' set in negative chain reactions are at risk for the continuation of undesirable life events and their consequences. This trait can be intertwined, through the resilience process, with other features such as turning point experiences and the steeling effect. In the former, the turning point experience likely demonstrates to the individual the viability of more positive alternatives or the fallibility of current trajectories. In the latter, negative experiences reinforce individuals' desire to establish new thought and behavioral patterns.

In the research data, examples of breaking negative chain reactions and establishing positive ones were plentiful. Participants, upon realizing their capabilities and becoming aware of their surrounding cultures and influences, actively chose to assert control on their life course path. The positive consequences of their choices influenced future decisions and the establishment of positive chain reactions was in evidence. For example, Participant 1 ended relationships that centered on "clubbing" and maintaining

what he viewed as a counterproductive lifestyle and he instead chose to enlist in the military and make choices that would benefit his career in the future. Participant 2 eschewed his father's wishes that he follow in his career path, which was low-paying, geographically confining, and arduous, and chose instead to enlist in the military. His choice was positively reinforced because the military gave him the capacity to travel; his new social environment enabled him to meet the woman he would marry; and his subsequent ability to seek higher education later was made possible. For Participant 3, the choice to strike out on her own, while notably difficult, provided her with the positive mental and emotional feedback of self-determination, which led to further actions of independence and self-reliance. Participant 4 broke negative chain reactions by leaving his home, entering foster care, and attending a boarding school that provided a safer physical environment. While his transition was not entirely smooth, he reported becoming more accustomed to the boarding school environment and subsequently having academic and social successes. These achievements were lauded by his foster parents and established positive chain reactions, eventually leading Participant 4 to a military career that he described as "very rewarding." Similarly, Participant 5 ended up with a naval career that was an obvious source of great personal and professional satisfaction. This result was due to the breaking of negative chain reactions in his youth when he chose to challenge himself more academically as a result of a turning point experience with a high school teacher. This contributed to heightened self-worth and established the positive chain reaction of challenging himself more often and on different fronts.

Perseverance.

A requisite feature in the process of establishing positive chain reactions after breaking negative ones is the passage of time. In all cases, participants experienced challenging circumstances that required them to persevere before the rewards or positive consequences of new thought and behavior patterns were fully felt. Particular examples of perseverance have been illustrated prior, but the mention of this theme is apt in this discussion because it was cited by all of the participants.

Financial wherewithal.

Becoming financially stable was a key feature in the lives of each participant, as evidenced not only by their narratives, but by their personal reactions when recounting their first awareness of financial security. Figure 7 illustrated verbal and physical reactions to this portion of the interviews. This event constituted an establishment of positive chain reactions because it represented a break from the past (GP) and served to open up new opportunities (Rutter, 1999). Participants mentioned being able to make purchases of clothing, the ability to travel, and the until-then-unknown prospect of having a savings account as milestones that were especially positive reinforcing experiences.

Self-actualization/resistance to victim mentality.

Each participant's journey of self-actualization can be interpreted as a series of chain reactions. The GP from which each emerged had affected generations of their families and neighbors. Had the participants not chosen to eliminate negative chain reactions and establish positive ones, their life trajectories would likely have been vastly different. Mental attributes that recur in resilience literature indicate that the effects of

planning and personal agency are key features of resilient individuals (Hauser, Allen, & Golden, 2006; Rutter 2012, 2013; Ungar, Liebenberg, Dudding, Armstrong, & Van de Vijver, 2013). Self-agency was clear in their accounts as was their propensity to plan. All participants in this study indicated that their emergence from GP was a source of accomplishment for them, yet each had the view that his or her journey was unremarkable and replicable. Since each viewed his or her life course as a series of choices and steps, the positive chain reaction established would likely reinforce their confidence in self-agency and eliminate fatalistic views. As such, all discussed their observations of others currently mired in poverty or GP. While there was empathy, there was little acceptance of others who viewed themselves as "victims" of poverty or GP. Four of the five participants indicated that increased personal agency and planning on the part of those in poverty or GP (who are able-bodied as well as mentally and emotionally competent) would likely eliminate most if not all of the obstacles preventing their emergence. In addition, all participants indicated a personal willingness to assist others in their efforts to emerge from poverty or GP, and cited this impulse as a contributing factor in participating in this research project. As an educator, Participant 2 currently actively gravitates toward the less fortunate students in his classes, much like the nuns did for him as a child and adolescent. In a similar way, Participant 3 spoke about how, during her teaching career, she sought to help the underprivileged female students in her classes that came from backgrounds comparable to her origins—patriarchal, strict, and overtly religious. Both of these examples demonstrate a non-traditional pedagogy of using personal experience to relate to more underserved students in the classroom through

personal narratives that resonate with both the educator and the student (Parker & Craig, 2015).

Generally positive attitude and no lingering resentment toward others.

The earnest accounts offered by participants indicated a strong desire to share their personal experiences as a means of contributing to the greater good. That being the case, all five had an attitude of beneficence. This generally positive attitude was reported by each as crucial in both breaking negative chain reactions and establishing positive ones. Rather than exhibiting characteristics of pessimism, participants in this research study all reported and displayed a more optimistic outlook. They reported that this sanguine bearing had influenced their actions since adolescence or childhood. The belief that they were agents of their own change imparted a positive, confident impression to each participant's narrative. Interview data contained no indications of negativity and field notes corroborate that each interview had an upbeat, cheerful overtone. The positive chain reaction made clear in this theme is that the employment of a constructive, affirming mindset guided the choices made by each participant in their personal journey out of GP. The participants all perceived a substantial benefit in maintaining a genial outlook.

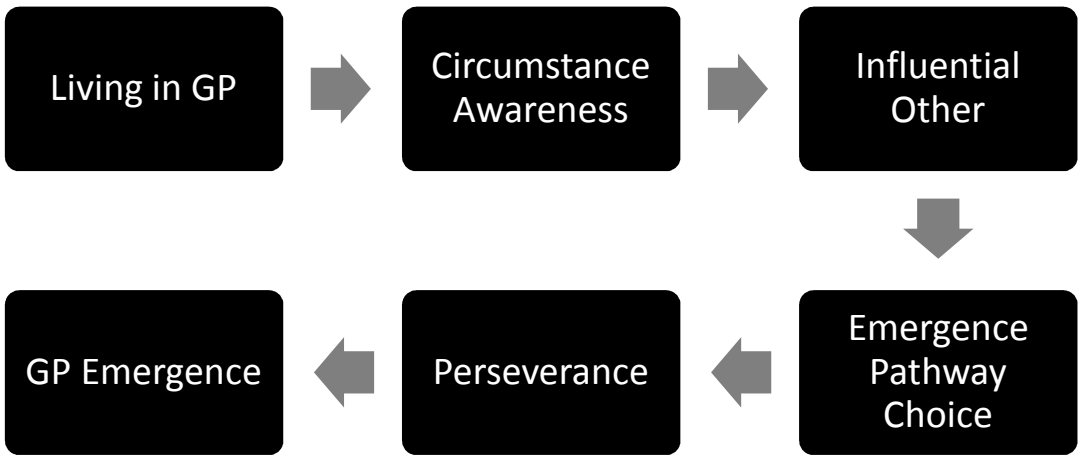
This perspective also had some bearing on the participants' views of others in their lives. Rutter (2012) indicates that life course findings in the field of resilience signify that suitable or positive incidents in adulthood can significantly counteract previous hardships. Participant 4, in recounting his adolescent separation from mother and brother, bore no ill will or resentment toward either as an adult. His view was that the

separation was necessary and practical in order for him to establish a more positive life course. Likewise, Participant 3, who was raised in a very onerous and "suffocating" environment, did not make any statements of blame or lingering animosity toward her family. Instead, she classified the behavior of her parents as evidence of "ignorance;" her tone and language was sympathetic and thoughtful.

Potential Model for Emergence from GP without Higher Education

Potential model restated.

As outlined in Figure 1 in the previous chapter, the potential model for GP emergence without higher education beyond high school or obtaining a high school equivalency that came to light as a result of this research project is as follows:



Of course, proposing a model based on the limited number of participants involved in this research project could be construed as foolhardy, yet the consistencies in the narratives bear noting. The phenomenon in question is narrow and the theoretical lens through

which it is considered is very specific, so in the context of both, suggesting a potential model for individuals in GP with no access to higher education opportunities is prudent.

Examination of the potential model must also be made in the context of existing literature. A search for models of emergence from GP without the benefit of higher education beyond high school or obtaining a high school equivalency yielded none, which was unsurprising in light of the narrow parameters of the research. Yet, there is ample research available in regard to poverty, and in some cases GP, and how it relates to specific steps of the proposed model.

The most similar research found was the work of Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, Swezey and Wicks (2014), a study of doctoral students who grew up in poverty. Participants in that research cited the presence of what they termed "positive significant individuals," that parallel this research project's concept of influential others as key to the emergence process. Their research also echoes turning points, the steeling effect, and the breaking of negative chain reactions as significant elements of the poverty emergence process for their specific participants. The focus of their research is different, however, since they centered on graduate students' doctoral persistence. Other sources of greater length mention some or most of the proposed model's components as a larger view of resilience in general. For example, Southwick & Charney's (2012) book on resilience and Hauser, Allen, and Golden's (2006) volume on resilient teens both contain mentions of circumstance awareness, IOs, and perseverance as factors in poverty/emergence from GP journeys. While the verbiage differs, the concepts are indistinguishable.

Walsh et al., (2014), in their study of predictors of students' social-ecological engagement, indicated a strong link between IOs by linking school engagement with exposure to social interactions with adults and a positive peer cohort. Mentoring programs, designed to help at-risk youth and IOs meet and develop beneficial relationships, have well-documented accounts in the literature (Herrera, DuBois, & Grossman, 2013; Tolan, Henry, Schoeny, Lovegrove, & Nichols, 2014; Wasburn-Moses, Noltemeyer, & Schmitz, 2015).

Angela Duckworth's (2007, 2013, 2014) recent and highly-publicized studies on grit, self-control, and the characteristics of what makes individuals successful, cites perseverance as a key factor of achievement in the face of difficult circumstances. In fact, the link between perseverance and achievement has been researched extensively, from several different perspectives: scientific, social sciences, humanities, historically, et cetera.

High degrees of self-agency and self-determination have been correlated with a resistance to internalizing low socio-economic status (Jackson, Richman, LeBelle, Lempereut, & Twenge, 2014). This indicates that individuals with higher levels of agency, self-esteem, and competence are more resistant to accepting limitations placed upon them in childhood and adolescence based on GP status. As Thoits (2013) states, individuals with sufficient coping abilities are more apt to foresee potential difficulties, especially those beyond one's control, and take appropriate preemptive or evasive action. Taking some form of action, irrespective of the results, can be consequential. Anxiety levels and their concurrent effects are not only impacted by the results of problem-

solving efforts, but also by the mere attempt to surmount obstacles (Thoits, 2013). Thoits (2006) also suggests that active engagement in confronting issues, even when unsuccessful, still has an ancillary effect of some stress mitigation and agency development. Emergence pathway choices, themselves dynamic processes that may have evolved over time (as evidenced by the military career choices in Participants 4 and 5), were shown in this research to be significantly impacted by participants' high levels of self-agency. The data indicated that participants had not internalized their original socio-economic status. All participants showed an inclination towards self-agency and self-determination, even in spite of some missteps along their trajectories. According to the data, their independent planning and actions positively reinforced their future decision-making.

Limitations

The sample size of this research study is a limitation because findings are not generalizable and the potential model could also be negatively impacted. A potential weakness of a phenomenological study of emerging from GP, as mentioned in Chapter 1, did emerge as a factor deserving consideration. Since emergence from GP is a lifelong process that indelibly alters the person experiencing it, might that fact adversely affect the results of the research? Since this is not ascertainable, perhaps a longitudinal study, conducted at different points in the life course of participants, might have yielded different results. Limitations regarding the reliability of participants' recall appear to have been minimized, however, since all participants unhesitatingly offered personal

information both negative and positive. Indications are that participants accurately described their own actions and their initial intentions.

Social Change Implications

Acknowledging that individuals in GP, especially those in adolescence and early adulthood, possess personal agency could be the first step toward social change. Rather than permitting their circumstances to be internalized, awareness needs to be raised that they themselves are the most important advocates and actors in their personal journey. As the literature has shown, GP brings with it characteristics that are present in family and social units that could be transmitted to subsequent generations. As such, guarding against such tendencies could be an insulating influence for children and adolescents. Within families, warm relationships and a positive atmosphere have been shown to mitigate negative outside sources of anxiety and serve as a protective factor (Bowes, Maughan, Caspi, Moffitt, & Arsenault, 2010; Rutter, 2013). With this in mind, more focused family intervention strategies could be designed to help children resist the internalization of their GP circumstances. Educating parents and caregivers could be a critical step in fostering self-agency in subsequent generations. The most promising social change implication revealed by this study was the impact of autonomous action by each participant as a result of their personal impetus. In all cases, their actions were a learned response and took into account each participants' areas of strength and deficit. Cultivating this belief in self-agency and advocacy, going much deeper than make-believe stories and abstract clichés a la motivational posters and public service announcements, is what made these participants successful. Recalling that a common

belief among individuals in the GP culture that society owes them a living (Attree, 2006; Beegle, 2003; Chronic Poverty Research Centre [CPRC], 2014; Harper, Marcus, & Moore, 2003; Jensen, 2009), self-agency and advocacy could be a tool in helping to erode this conception. Education in self-agency could become a component of outreach programs and early childhood education programs such as Head Start.

Another related social change implication is the participants' strong response to the replicability of their accomplishments and their willingness to share their personal journeys as a means of education. Mentoring programs specifically tailored to kids in poverty or GP that pair individuals like those in this research could be effective interventions. Research indicates a strong correlation between mentoring success and mentoring programs that promote relationships that are not only based on role modeling but also include participants that have a high degree of perceived similarity (Mitchell, Eby, & Ragins, 2015). Making it clear to those who have overcome GP without higher education that their experiences are worthy of sharing and could benefit others is crucial.

Suggestions for Action

Social work professionals, policy makers, and educators should consider the results of this study as a key component to finding new ways to serve those in GP. Promoting self-efficacy and demonstrating alternative means to escaping GP, other than higher education, is a foundational component to GP alleviation. The potential for the establishment of a mentoring program is evident and could prove to be a relatively low-cost alternative or supplement to other programs already in place.

Similarly, dissemination of research centered on perseverance and resilience should be a higher priority for educators and agencies that serve the underprivileged. Cultivating more resilient qualities in children can help guide them toward a sense of self-agency and confidence while also offering a more hopeful future outlook. Of course, hope alone is not adequate and such research should be accompanied by resources that help connect parents and children to specific programs, agencies, and potential mentors. These tangible instruments would be pivotal for converting simple hope into concrete measures.

Possibilities for Future Studies

Research on individuals who emerge from GP without the benefit of higher education beyond high school or obtaining a high school equivalency is meager. Consequently, selecting any aspect of this research project upon which to expand would generate a heightened grasp of the subject. Due to the small scale of this study, the potential for future research is almost equally vast. Conducting a larger study with the same or very similar research questions would likely create new perspectives. Also, expanding the participant base would allow for contrasting this cohort's data and a larger one in meaningful ways.

A reality of this project that cannot be ignored is the fact that 80% of this study's participants had some sort of military background. Certainly military service offers a more all-encompassing employment experience than a conventional job, as well as a determinate and significant term of employment (enlistment). Additionally, few jobs can offer the entirety of what enlistment offers, especially to those in GP: specialized

training, housing, benefits, food, and clothing as well as a steady paycheck. Further research into this subset of those who have emerged from GP without higher education deserves more study not only in and of itself, but also in comparison to those who have emerged without military service. Is emergence from GP without higher education more prominent in one group than in the other? What other similarities and differences could appear between the two groups? Similarly, research into other specific groups of professionals (small business owners, entertainers, entrepreneurs, athletes, and others commonly viewed as "self-made," perhaps) could be conducted to see how their experiences differ from those who use the military as a poverty emergence solution.

Of course, the potential model for emergence from GP put forth invites examination. Any step of the process could be further studied through the theoretical lens of Rutter's resilience theory's other aspects. Good challenging questions for this model would be: how does emergence from GP without higher education differ from emergence from other types of poverty without higher education? Does each step necessarily rely on the sequencing proposed by this research? Are there definite and detectable sub-steps within the steps of the process, and if so, are they consistent enough across cases to be impactful? Will this model bear out over larger and larger samples of similar research cohorts? These are but a few of the questions that might direct future research.

In considering the super-ordinate themes that emerged from this study and what they indicated as far as a representative degree of self- knowledge and efficacy, the composite participant suggested by the data would have a definite set of characteristics. With that in mind, future research might be valuable for determining how such

characteristics were brought about in participants. Individuals' genetic, biological, and physical environments, as well as others, would be worthy of more in-depth research. Finally, there are several other theoretical lenses that offer insight into this phenomenon as well as greater scrutiny of this research's potential model. Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; 2008) is but one worthy of future examinations.

Reflection of Experiences as a Researcher

Resilience studies, especially in relation to GP, represented an area of particular interest; this specific area of social science provided an interesting way to pose the question: what is the lived experience of individuals who have undergone this particular phenomenon? Taking on a research project of this nature evolved from discovering others' life stories to creating a potential model for the prescribed circumstances. IPA analysis, being both dynamic and repetitive (Shinebourne, 2011), was beneficial in bringing consistencies among the narratives to the foreground. Notions held by the participants in regard to their early development in GP, as well as their personal emergence journeys were influenced by the prevailing ideals of American culture in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. In all cases, each lived experience required a rejection of said conventional wisdom insofar as their life courses were atypical and seemed to defy probability. What was distinctive about this group of people was that it appeared that their stories were varied and unconnected, even temporally as their ages range was as much as three decades. Yet, patterns across cases emerged that were compelling and rich.

Because I was raised in an environment of GP, there was a concerted and evolving effort made to bracket personal experiences along the entire sequence of the

research study. The interview phase was a particular challenge, since many of the recollections could have related to my personal experiences, yet there was care taken to maintain the requisite level of analytical distance from the material while still being warm and inviting to participants. My life course experience of varied in that education was the main tool for emergence from GP, so the dissimilarities between participants' accounts offered a far wider understanding of the phenomenon. This vast difference made the analysis process challenging yet resulted in thick, resonant insight.

The most significant aim of this study was to find the essence of the phenomenon of emergence from GP without higher education no matter where that process led. This is the goal of social science research, particularly qualitative phenomenological research, as it should strive to be an unbiased recounting of lived experiences. Yet, in retrospect, some of the findings likely could have been predicted. A high degree of self-awareness and the presence of persistence in each of the individuals, each super-ordinate themes, stand out as examples of this. Other discoveries, such as the consistency of IOs in each narrative and the participants' view that their accomplishments were unremarkable and replicable, came as a surprise.

One final observation in regard to the experience as a researcher: the narrow scope of this study made finding participants extremely challenging. Individuals in these particular circumstances appear to be a very under-studied subset of the population. The unique experience gained by searching for these specific types of people led to four general categories of individuals who have emerged from GP without higher education: the super-successful individuals whose successes are well-known; small business owners,

(many of whom were first-and second-generation Americans); veterans and active-duty military; and those who have inherited family-based operations such as farms. The struggle with each group was either inaccessibility or opportunity, as each of these types of individuals tend to be extremely busy. While the five participants uncovered proved to be exceptionally informative, reaching individuals who have lived out this particular phenomenon was laborious.

Conclusion

Five super-ordinate themes led to the conclusion that participants who emerged from GP without the benefit of higher education beyond high school or obtaining a high school equivalency saw this process as a matter of personal agency and responsibility. In addition, the significant influence of IOs was an important factor and classified as a true turning point experience. Requisite characteristics of those who achieve emergence from GP without higher education appear to be: accurate realization in regard to circumstances and capabilities, the willingness to work in a multitude of roles, and the ability to persevere in the face of difficulties.

In regard to the scope and theoretical lens of this study, the outcomes were supported by and supported the existing research. The emergence of Rutter's (1999, 2006, 2012, 2013, 2015) concepts in the narratives was notable, especially in regard to the concept of resilience as a fluid, vibrant process. Each story conveyed developments that were unconventional, responsive, and both pro- and reactive. Incorporating the variety of postures and views of the participants into the specific journey of emergence from GP nonetheless yielded consistencies. Turning point experiences, the steeling effect,

and the breaking of negative chain reactions and the establishment of positive ones were all evident. The normalization of their journeys, to the participants themselves, indicates one of two mindsets: either an abundance of humility on their part, or an unawareness that their experiences were not ordinary. My conclusion is that the latter is a more accurate representation of this group of participants, especially when coupled with their unanimous desire to share their stories with those currently in poverty and GP. Their rejection of passive acceptance reinforces research that self-agency and effort, even if unsuccessful, is paramount to overcoming adversity.

These outcomes suggest the potential to reconsider the nature of poverty alleviation practices, especially those which seek to temporarily aid the impoverished through financial assistance only. They give the opportunity to those who legislate policies that impact the poor as well as those are employed in capacities that directly serve them to reexamine how self-agency, and the role of influential others impact those they serve. Furthermore, there may be actionable value to this research if those who have lived this phenomenon can be somehow brought together with those currently in GP who have little or no higher education prospects.

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Appendix A: Screening Instrument

1. Have you had any formal education beyond high school or obtaining a high school equivalency?
2. Did you attend higher education AFTER having achieved financial solvency for five consecutive years? In other words, did you emerge from poverty and THEN seek education beyond high school or obtaining a high school equivalency?
3. Did your parents grow up in poverty?
4. When you were growing up, did your family qualify for the following: housing assistance, energy assistance, food stamps, free lunch or reduced price school lunch, free school breakfast, or free milk during school?
5. During your childhood, did your family receive any of the following: TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), AFDC (Aid for Families with Dependent Children), or General Assistance, SSI (Supplementary Social Security Income), CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program) benefits, or Medicaid?

Appendix B: Open-Ended Interview Questions

The questions used in the interviews are designed to foster open and natural autobiographical dialog on behalf of each participant. The questions focus on each participant's experience of growing up in generational poverty and his or her unique narrative of poverty emergence without the benefit of formal education beyond high school or obtaining a high school equivalency.

Awareness of circumstances during childhood/adolescence:

1. When did you first become aware of your family's economic situation?
2. How did you learn about your family's economic situation?
3. What obstacles or challenges arose out of your family's financial status during your childhood / adolescence?

Emotional impact of circumstances and future prospects:

4. How did you deal or cope with poverty-oriented obstacles or challenges during your childhood / adolescence?
5. As a teenager, how much did you think about or consider your impending adulthood?
6. How did your awareness of your impending adulthood impact you emotionally (make you feel)?

Formal education

7. What role did formal education play in your childhood / adolescence?
8. How important was formal education to those around you, such as: your immediate family, extended family, and peers?

9. Was formal education beyond high school or obtaining a high school equivalency something you desired? How did your desire/lack of desire affect you?
10. As a young adult, how did the reality of not continuing formal education beyond high school or obtaining a high school equivalency impact you?
11. As a young adult, did you have any relationships with peers who went on to post-secondary education?

Poverty emergence, young adulthood and beyond

12. At what point in your adult life did you realize you had emerged from poverty?
13. How did this realization affect you?
14. What do you consider the most influential factors of your personal emergence from GP?
15. As an adult who has emerged from GP without the benefit of formal education beyond high school or obtaining a high school equivalency, has your personal attitude toward formal education changed since you were an adolescent? How?
16. Considering the entire process of being born into GP until being fully emerged from poverty, what has that experience taught you?

Appendix C: Consent Form

Consent to Participate in Research

High Wire, No Net: Generational Poverty Emergence without Higher Education

Introduction and Purpose

My name is Corey Caugherty. I am a PhD student at Walden University, working with my faculty advisor, Dr. Mary Bold, in the School of Behavioral Sciences. I would like to invite you to take part in my dissertation research study, which concerns the life experiences of individuals who have emerged from generational poverty without the benefit of education beyond graduating from high school or obtaining a high school equivalency.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in my research, I will conduct an interview with you at a time and location of your choice. The interview will involve questions about your childhood and young adulthood, economic hardship, and your personal life experiences. It should last about 60-90 minutes. With your permission, I will audio record via digital recorder and take notes during the interview. The recording is to accurately record the information you provide, and will be used for transcription purposes only. If the audio recording makes you feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview, I can turn off the recorder at your request. Or if you don't wish to continue, you can stop the interview at any time.

I fully expect to conduct only one interview; however, follow-ups may be needed for added clarification. If so, I will contact you by phone to request this. This would only occur to seek explanation about specific elements of your personal story.

Benefits

There is no direct benefit to you from taking part in this study *[or state direct benefits if they exist]*. It is hoped that the research will *[describe benefits to society/ scientific knowledge as applicable]*.

Risks/Discomforts

Due to the deeply personal nature of the interviews, some of the research questions may make you uncomfortable or upset. You are free to decline to answer any questions you don't wish to, or to stop the interview at any time. As with all research, there is a small chance that confidentiality could be compromised; however, I am taking precautions to minimize this risk.

Confidentiality

Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used.

To minimize the risks to confidentiality, we will omit all names and personally identifiable information from study data and numerically code each participant's information. There will be no access to anyone else except for the researcher to study information. All hardware electronic and all written information will be secured in a locked file cabinet. No electronic information will be stored on cloud services, unless password protected.

When the research is completed, I may save the tapes and notes for use in future research done by myself or others. I will retain these records for up to 5 years after the study is over. The same measures described above will be taken to protect confidentiality of this study data.

Compensation
You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

Rights
Participation in research is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to take part in the project. You can decline to answer any questions and are free to stop taking part in the project at any time. Whether or not you choose to participate in the research and whether or not you choose to answer a question or continue participating in the project, there will be no penalty to you or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Questions
If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me. I can be reached at (XXX)-XXX-XXXX or xxxxxx@xxxxxx.com

If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the Walden University's Institutional Review Board via e-mail at irb@waldenu.edu.

****

CONSENT

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your own records.

If you wish to participate in this study, please sign and date below.

_____
Participant's Name *(please print)*

_____ _____
Participant's Signature Date